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# THE REALM OF POETRY

## AN INTRODUCTION

BY  
STEPHEN J. BROWN S.J.

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*First published January 1921*

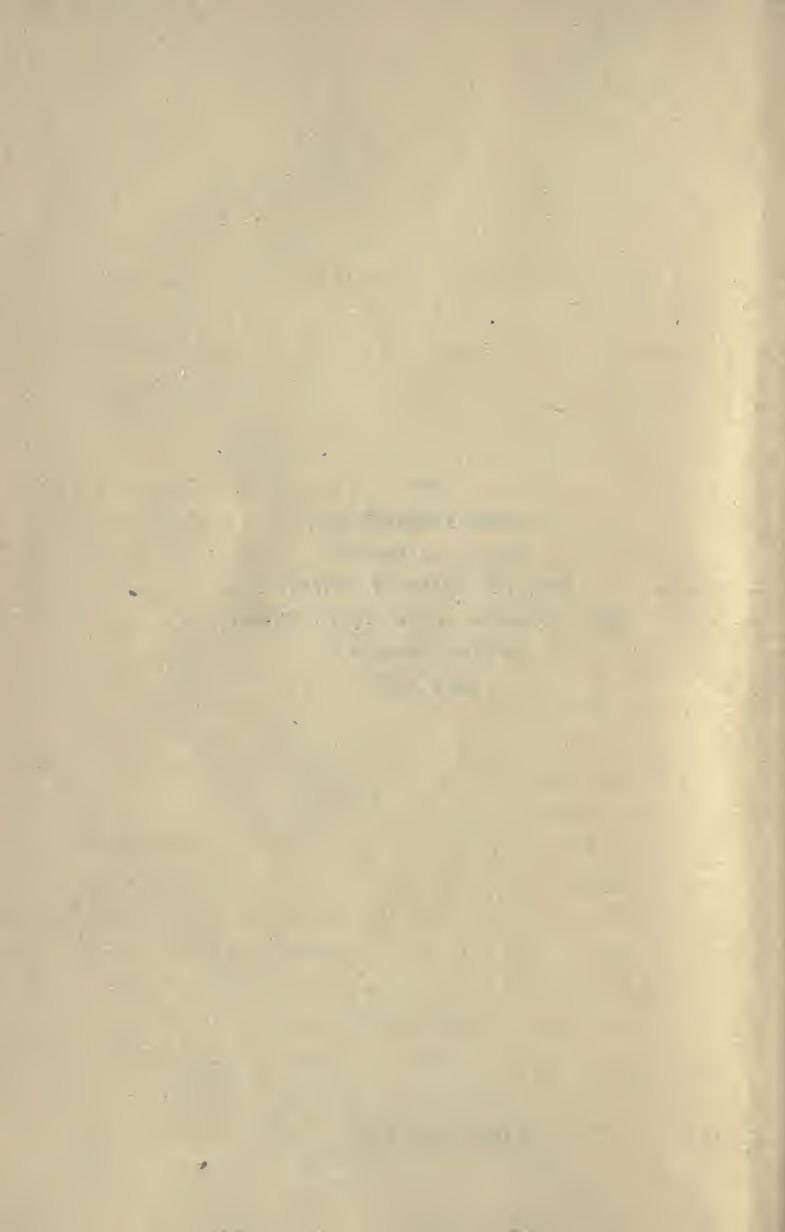
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*Printed in Great Britain  
by Turnbull & Spears, Edinburgh*

TO  
MY FATHER  
WHO FIRST LED ME  
INTO THE REALM OF POETRY  
THIS EFFORT TO GUIDE OTHERS INTO IT  
IS AFFECTIONATELY  
DEDICATED

501096



## TO THE READER

**T**HIS little book does not aspire to be a learned treatise on the history of poetry or on the science of poetics, such as the Saintsburys and Bradleys and Gummeres have given us. Nor, on the other hand, is it a school manual, containing all that is useful for the passing of examinations. It was written in the hope of making its readers sharers in an experience which has been for the writer, as for countless other men, a source of unfeigned delight. Were I writing about flowers I might make a contribution to natural science, or compile a useful manual of botany for the class-room, or write a book meant simply to impart a joy. In a sense it is this last kind of book that I have tried to write about poetry.

I say 'in a sense,' for a book about the appreciation of poetry must needs differ widely from a book about the love of flowers, and that for the good reason that poetry's appeal is to other and higher faculties than can be reached by the shapes and colours of flowers. If a book about the appreciation of poetry is to achieve its aim it must justify poetry to these higher faculties. Appreciation must grow out of knowledge and understanding. One does not learn to love and admire poetry

by dint of being told how admirable and lovable a thing it is. One will not come to appreciate poetry merely from having listened to its praises.

Accordingly in this little book I have tried to do something more than sing the praises of poetry. I have attempted, in fact, to combine within its narrow compass three things not usually, I think, to be found together in books about poetry.

In Part One I endeavour to give such a notion of the nature and inner meaning of poetry as could be conveyed without recourse to the technical language of literary criticism or the abstruser notions of philosophy. Such an endeavour, if any measure of success has been attained, may, I think, justify itself by the consideration, already spoken of, that true appreciation must arise out of understanding. And here let me say that though I should be glad that this book should lead to a love of poetry in general, it will fulfil all its purpose only if it help toward appreciation of the *best* poetry. Not that I can hope to furnish the reader with a ready-made standard for the gauging of values. Possibly no such standard is discoverable. But it is not too much to hope that the reader is here furnished with helps and means toward the discovering and using of his own judgment—his best judgment, which is perhaps the only standard that is of great practical value to the ordinary man. At all events, the discovery and use of such a standard will free him from slavery to the critics and the *littérateurs*. Why should one bow down before



the idol of the day because he looms large through the clouds of critics' incense? Why should one desert some well-beloved poet because some supercilious *littérateur* has dismissed him with a disdainful epithet? The chorus of critics and "indolent reviewers" has but to cry "Admire here" or "Admire there" and the average reader, though his natural common sense and instinctive good taste protest the while, does submissively their bidding. And as the reader without knowledge or principles to guide his judgment may be a slave to the critics, so may he be a bondsman to this poet or to that, and the result is not less unfortunate. From this, too, would I fain help to free him. To no poet must one swear unquestioning allegiance. Homer has sometimes nodded, Wordsworth and Victor Hugo have written a great deal of rubbish.

But even to one who fully knows the nature of poetry comes the natural question: What may poetry be worth to me? A natural question, and rightly demanding answer, so only it be asked in no calculating, pettifogging spirit, but with the seriousness of one who sets a value on such time and energy as are given him for the business of life. To this question I attempt an answer in Part Two. It was said with truth by a recent writer, "Poetry is taught in all schools, men are born with a *natural* appetite for it; and not one in a thousand learns, nor one in a hundred ever reads, a line when his school-days are over."<sup>1</sup> Possibly the cares and preoccupations

<sup>1</sup> E. Greening Lamborn, *The Rudiments of Criticism*.

of their lives leave no place for poetry. Possibly, too, its true significance and value for life has never been brought home to them.

In Part Three I have endeavoured to show how in practice the taste for poetry, for the best poetry, may be formed and fostered first in oneself and then, if occasion offer, in those one influences.

For whom is the little book intended? It was written at the end of nine years spent in teaching literature to boys of various ages. I should be glad above all if this book should come into the hands of any who are doing a similar work. Inevitable inexperience and the pressure of programmes combined to make the writer's practice fall far short of the precepts here set forth. But the book is offered to teachers and all who guide first steps in the ways of literature in the hope that those who use it may do better than its author. May it help them to give to young minds that literary taste which, though not the highest outcome of education, is a far higher one than any quantity of information, however 'useful.'

I hope it may be helpful also to the average man or woman with the usual education and a certain leisure for reading. Such readers often eschew poetry because they have never been led to appreciate it, or else read poetry merely because to do so is the fashion or the correct thing or a proof that they are intellectual and educated.

From what has been said it will perhaps be clear why

I have practically confined myself to English poetry. That is, as a rule, the only literature with which my hoped-for readers are really familiar. Moreover, the narrow compass of the book called for concentration. For similar reasons I have drawn my illustrations from the best-known poets, nor have I shrunk from quotations familiar to all students of letters.

Lastly, I should scarcely have undertaken this work had I not the hope of being useful in some little way to my own country. A day may come when its native language will supplant English. But that day is distant. Meanwhile the greater part of the literary training of its youth will continue to be carried on through the medium of English literature. Toward making that training answer more fully the true purposes of education, I should be glad to think I might contribute, be it ever so slightly.

S. J. B.

MILLTOWN PARK, DUBLIN

*August 1920*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I WISH to express my gratitude in the first place to the Rev. Professor George O'Neill, S.J., of the National University of Ireland, for many corrections and suggestions made during the course of the work, and for his kindness in undertaking the irksome task of revising the proofs. My best thanks are due to Mrs M. Pearde Beaufort for the preparation of the Index.

I have also to thank those publishers who have kindly permitted me to reproduce poems of which they hold the copyright, viz., Messrs Burns, Oates and Washbourne, for the use of *To a Snow-flake*, by Francis Thompson; and Messrs Macmillan, for *The Earth and Man*, by Stopford A. Brooke.

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# THE REALM OF POETRY

## PROLOGUE

### TO THE NON-READER OF POETRY

**J**UST a hundred years ago Hazlitt, in an essay on poetry, looked forward, not without forebodings, to the future. He thought that the progress of science and even of general culture was gradually narrowing the limits of imagination; knowledge was threatening to clip the wings of poesy. A few years later Macaulay wrote, "We think that, as civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines."<sup>1</sup> It was a characteristic phrase, but it expressed a misgiving not peculiar to minds of Macaulay's stamp. Till but a few years back it was not uncommon for lovers of poetry to prophesy, from similar causes, its eventual decay.<sup>2</sup> Every new widening of the domain of science—and that domain was widening with ever-increasing rapidity—seemed to be a conquest from the realm of poetry. Nor was this the only sign that boded ill for the future. A growing commercialism was creating an atmosphere in which poetry seemed destined to wither and die. None but the leisured few, it seemed,

<sup>1</sup> Essay on Milton.

<sup>2</sup> Against such prophets Principal Shairp raised his voice in the seventies. "Will science put out poetry?" he asked in his *The Poetic Interpretation of Nature*; and answered boldly, "There is no fear that it will, as long as human nature remains what it is."

could henceforward indulge in time for the study of poetry, and the leisured man was fast becoming an anomaly in a hustling world. Moreover, there was your practical man who questioned the usefulness of such a study. The twentieth century was calling for new technical equipment and more thorough practical training for the ever-quickenning pace of life. New subjects claimed a place in the crowded curriculum of education. There was danger that general culture, the old 'humanities,' would be thrown aside for the new culture of efficiency. The danger, as we know, is not yet over. The 'practical' man is still abroad, clamorous for up-to-date methods, contemptuous of the old paths, as firm a believer as Mr Gradgrind himself in the efficacy of 'facts,' though he may now call them 'vocational instruction' or 'efficiency.'

But time has strangely belied the prophets, and every day that passes gives the lie to the practical man. For never have such streams of poetry come from "Helicon's harmonious springs" as have poured forth during the past ten years in Ireland, and the last four or five, let us say, in Great Britain. Life in both countries was raised to a higher tension, though by different causes, and there followed "a great unsealing of the fountains of poetry." The poet sang no longer to a fascinated and adoring group of *litterati*, but to a nation. This nation-wide interest has shown itself in unmistakable fashion by the mutual response of demand and output. "No student of literature," said Professor E. de Sélincourt, lecturing in 1917 before the English Association, "can fail to be struck by the mass of poetry that is to-day both written and read." For several years past scarcely a week has gone by but three, four, a



dozen volumes of new verse have issued from the press.<sup>1</sup> The poetic output of the writer's small country in its two languages has been surprising. And undoubtedly a great deal of this poetry is widely read. I have before me a little book of selections from contemporary poetry. Two years after its first appearance it was in its thirty-first thousand; while the poem-books of popular writers such as Mr John Oxenham and Mr Rudyard Kipling attain a distribution of more than two hundred thousand. Reviews have been founded—among them the excellent *Poetry Review*—that concern themselves wholly with poetry.<sup>2</sup> And there is to-day scarcely a review of any standing that does not set aside for original verse a certain portion of its space. A 'Poetry Bookshop' has recently been established, and there are even 'Poets' Schools.'

One gathers from a recent survey of contemporary poetry<sup>3</sup> that in the United States interest in poetry has never been so great nor so widespread as it is at present. "American poets," we read, "are giving us more good poetry to-day than has ever been produced in any other period of our history." *Poetry*, the first of American poetry magazines, has flourished since 1912. And now it has rivals in *The Lyric* and *Contemporary Verse*.

<sup>1</sup> In the year 1915 alone some 567 volumes devoted to poetry and the drama were published in England. Of these a considerable proportion were volumes of new, original verse. And besides these volumes there is the vast quantity of verse that is published in the magazines.

<sup>2</sup> Another is *Poetry*, "a magazine of verse, comment, and criticism." *The London Mercury*, the new literary review, devotes much space to poetry and the criticism of poetry. Five numbers of *Aengus*, an "All Poetry Journal," have appeared in Dublin.

<sup>3</sup> *New Voices: An Introduction to Contemporary Poetry*, by Marguerite Wilkinson, 1920.

Verse is a regular feature of most American periodicals. There are the Poetry Society and the Lyric Society, active organizations for the cultivation and advancement of poetry.

Therefore, non-readers of poetry, if it should be that the reading of poetry has seemed to you an occupation somewhat out of date, somewhat ill suited to these strenuous days, you will perhaps agree with me that there are some grounds for thinking that you may have been misled. There is even a commercial side to poetry, if that be an item in its favour. A good many people, for instance, make a little money directly or indirectly by poetry. A great many seemingly serious-minded people, moreover, are not ashamed to delight in reading and discussing it. And then there is the fact of its continual ascendancy in the educational world. In all schools and universities it continues to be taught and studied not less than it was fifty years ago; nay, so far as English poetry is concerned, far more. The public even pays large sums for professorships and lectureships to teach it.

Lovers of poetry, if any such should chance to read—uninvited—the foregoing pages, will pardon, I hope, the considerations they contain. Their purpose is to put out of the way certain prejudices which for many bar the access to poetry. Such prejudices are widespread enough, though few people may openly confess themselves to belong to “the practical and secular part of mankind who look upon artists and poets as inefficient and brainsick people under whose spell it would be a serious calamity to fall, although they may be called in on feast days as an ornament and luxury with the cooks, hairdressers, and florists.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this little

<sup>1</sup> George Santayana.

book may contribute to save you, reader, from belonging to this "practical and secular part of mankind."

But you have no taste for poetry? Have you given the taste so much as a chance of showing its head above ground in that perhaps somewhat arid soil, your mind? Yet it might be a plant worth experimenting with at all events. May I suggest some possible reasons why you have no taste for poetry? It is very possible that poetry is one of those subjects that you have learned to dislike because of the way they were taught you at school. Perhaps the poetry lesson in your class meant so many lines that you were forced to stand and deliver under threat of levelled ferule—that, and no more. Could you grow to love it so? Or, you were "crammed with notes on meanings and allusions and grammatical examples and biographical records till you learned to curse the poets and all their works"? The seed of the taste for poetry had small chance of even sowing itself in such circumstances. Or at best was there perhaps no poetry-loving mind to communicate to yours something of its own enthusiasm?

And without any positive poisoning of the soil there may be other causes why no taste has sprung up in you. You may, for instance, have begun with the wrong poet. You may have tried to wade through a long prosy poem of Wordsworth when you ought to have been reading something vigorous and stirring from Byron.<sup>1</sup> Or you lost yourself in the alleged (I

<sup>1</sup> "It is all very well," says a schoolboy author, "for a middle-aged man to worship Wordsworth and calm philosophy. But youth wants colour, life, passion, the poetry of revolt." (Alec Waugh in *The Loom of Youth*.) Yet I have known schoolboys of fifteen who genuinely worshipped Wordsworth. But let me quote further: "At school it is the common thing for boys to pass through their



am not forgetting Mr Birrell's qualification) obscurities of Browning or amid the sublimated abstractions of Shelley when you would do better to begin with Longfellow or Kipling—I shall not say Eliza Cook or Mrs Hemans. You tried to read Milton when you ought to have been reading John Oxenham. If this be so, try once more. One does not throw over novel-reading because one is unable to read Meredith, say, or Hardy. But try this time with some sort of guidance—such guidance, possibly, as this book may give, if you do not disdain it. Again, even supposing that the poet is not beyond you, you may have been unhappy in the *poems* that you attempted, for not all the poems that are printed in the 'works' of poets are worth *your* reading, or perhaps anybody else's, unless it be the literary specialist. You may also have tried the wrong *kind* of poetry—nature poetry, for instance, instead of the tragedy and comedy of human life. But in the realm of poetry there is every variety of climate and landscape. There is epic poetry such as the *Iliad* or *Paradise Lost* or the *Táin*; there is dramatic poetry such as Shakespeare's and Sheridan's; there is love poetry—Burns and Moore and Coventry Patmore and so many others; there is narrative poetry—the metrical tales of Byron and Wordsworth, Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, Longfellow's exquisite *Tales of a Wayside Inn*; and the ballads of the Scottish Border; there is patriotic poetry like that of Davis and Young Ireland. You cannot hope to appreciate equally all six years' traffic without ever realizing what beauty is. They are told to read Virgil, Tennyson, and Browning, the philosophers, the comforters of old age: but boys never hear of Byron, Swinburne, and Rossetti, men with big flaming hearts that cried for physical beauty and the love of tangible things."

types of poetry. Your taste may be all for action and the open air and movement and life. There is poetry that will meet such a taste. You will like Mr Chesterton's *Battle of Lepanto*. To others will appeal the poetry of reflection, records (immortal, some of them) of momentary vision, fleeting gleams of insight into life and the soul of man.<sup>1</sup>

Another possible source of your distaste might be that you did not read poetry in the right mood. You cannot read poetry as you would read a paragraph, however 'pithy,' in a newspaper, or as you would race through some light novel to the foreseen *dénouement*. For a poem, as we shall see, is the outcome of a mood in which the poet realizes thought or thing with vividness and intensity. It needs to be taken into our minds in a mood such as that which gave it birth—that is, with our faculties of realization aroused and, as it were, focussed. And so it must be read in peace, with leisure and thoughtfulness and a sort of reverence. Else it is lost on us.

It may be, on the other hand, that you have expected from poetry something it is not prepared to give, or gives but seldom. You may have gone seeking 'lessons' and a philosophy, and, not finding them, have lost interest through disappointment. Now poetry has, in a sense, its lessons, as we shall see hereafter, and it has, sometimes at least, a background of philosophy, and of theology too, for that matter. But that is, so to speak, over and above, for the true mission of poetry, as of all art, is to delight. It is a joy for ever. Turn

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent review of the various kinds of poetry I would refer the reader to *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*, by W. H. Hudson, pp. 125-150 (new edition).

to it again, seeking that only, and perhaps the rest will be added unto you.

At all events I am not disposed to believe that the cause of your distaste is any inherent defect in your nature. Shakespeare said that the man who is not "moved by concord of sweet sounds" is fit for a number of things which we do not care to associate with ourselves. Yet, after all, lack of an 'ear' for music is a natural defect for which a man is not responsible. You may then possibly be deaf to the *music* of verse. But poetry appeals not to the ear alone : it appeals also to faculties with the lack of which you would scarcely care to be reproached. Resign yourself to forgo that part of the delight of poetry which is not for you. But resolve that you will enjoy what remains.

If those suggested be indeed your mistakes, the writer sympathizes with you, for he has made them well-nigh all. But his faith never wavered, and from his very early years poetry has been for him a joy which he would fain have you share.

You may find help toward the appreciation of poetry in the chapters that follow. They attempt to show you what one may find in poetry. But when all is said you must taste for yourself and taste again.



## PART I

### WHAT IS POETRY?

**T**HIS is a question with a history. Some three hundred years before the Christian era the Greek philosopher Aristotle<sup>1</sup> set himself to answer it. A thousand times since then it has been asked, as the questions, What is life? and What is truth? (think of 'jesting Pilate'!) have been asked a thousand times. And among the thousand answers it can scarcely be said that any one has been taken as final. Why, then, do we once more ask the question as though hopeful of succeeding where so many have failed? It is because, if we cannot hope for an answer that shall be the final truth of the matter, we can certainly hope to gather up such approximations to the truth as the repeated asking of the question has from time to time called forth. We can put together an answer that will suffice for our purposes, seeing that we do not seek a strictly scientific definition, but a faithful description that shall be, let us hope, not only true and even accurate so far as it goes, but pregnant, suggestive, helpful.

For the moment, let it be remembered, we are asking one thing only: What *is*—what is the nature of—

<sup>1</sup> His treatise on Poetics has, within these last few years, been many times edited with much learned comment and dissertation. Such editions are valuable to the advanced student of poetic theory.

poetry? We are seeking, that is to say, to distinguish it from other forms of literary composition. Let us first inquire what is meant by the *term* when used in its proper and primary sense.<sup>1</sup> A definition of the term is not, indeed, enough, but it is necessary and must come first; else we have confusion. When we use such expressions as 'French poetry,' 'nature poetry,' 'the poetry of Wordsworth,' or when we speak of 'poetry' *tout court*, what do we mean? I take it that we have in mind *literary compositions in metrical form*. I take it, moreover, that in such expressions we are conscious of using the word poetry in its proper and literal sense. The word poetry, then, in the ordinary meaning of the term refers to literary compositions in metrical form.<sup>2</sup> But are *all* such compositions rightly and properly described as poetry? May nursery rimes—our friends of long ago, *Little Jack Horner*, the *Song of Sixpence*, and the rest—be so described? Or Lear's *Nonsense Rhymes*, or Gilbert's *Bab Ballads*, or mnemonic verses, or limericks? I think it is generally agreed that these, though undoubtedly metrical compositions, are not poetry. Their authors would

<sup>1</sup> "I am inclined to think," said Keble in his *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, "that the standard of common speech is nowhere more profitably appealed to than upon a question of this kind, which, although properly depending . . . upon the arbitrament of Nature herself and the simplest instincts of all mankind, yet we know to be complicated and perplexed by the fine distinctions of clever critics." Be this as it may, I am seeking a definition which at all events shall not run counter to the meanings of speech universally accepted among educated people.

<sup>2</sup> "One might simply point," says Professor Gummere rightly, "to the actual use of the word poetry and be done. The advocate of prose poetry, when he comes to write a history or compile an anthology of poetry, puts no prose into it at all." (*The Beginnings of Poetry*; Macmillan, 1901.)



be the last to claim them as such. Again, is it not said every day, and at least sometimes said with reason, of some assiduous and aspiring rhymester that in all his pages there is not a spark of poetry? There is, then, metrical composition from which is rightly withheld the name of poetry. What shall we call it? Call it verse, rhymes, what you please, so only you give it not the high name of poetry. To have poetry you must have metrical form plus an element which for the moment we shall call  $x$ , the unknown quantity.

But is not the term poetry used also where there is no metrical form? Do we not speak of the poetry of life, the poetry of architecture (as Ruskin does in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*), nay, even of prose poetry?<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly, but I contend that here the word is used, as so many similar words are used, in a transferred, or at all events wider, sense, other than its primary and literal meaning. That which has, whether in a figurative or even in a literal sense, some of the qualities of poetry proper is described simply as poetry. Music in its plain and proper sense is "concord of sweet sounds." Yet one poet sings, "There was laughter in his heart and music in his laughter"; another, "How light the touches are that kiss the music from the chords of life,"<sup>2</sup> and yet another speaks of "the still, sad music of humanity." What there can be of poetry in life, or in architecture, or in prose, will appear from what we have to say of the *nature* of poetry. To this let us now pass.

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Newman says of the Church that "her very being is poetry; every psalm, every petition, every collect, the cross, the mitre, the thurible, is a fulfilment of some dream of childhood or aspiration of youth" (*Essays*, vol. ii., "John Keble").

And first I shall distinguish<sup>1</sup>—without claiming the distinction as quite philosophical—in a piece of literary work which is admittedly true poetry, three things :

*The form.*

*The subject-matter or theme.*

*The spirit.*<sup>2</sup>

You must pardon, reader, for the moment these bare terms. They will begin to express realities for you, I hope, as we proceed. Let us take each in turn.

## I. THE FORM OF POETRY

In speaking of the form of poetry we must make yet another distinction, for in the form there are two elements :

(a) The versification—that is, the metre together with other accompanying sound-devices.

(b) The diction or choice of language.

### (a) Versification. The Music of Speech

Here we are confronted with a much-vexed question : Need there be always metre ?<sup>3</sup> Can there not be poetry without metre ? Did not Walt Whitman rise up as

<sup>1</sup> That is, *consider apart* without suggesting the possibility of separation in actual reality. In point of fact, by the separation of any one of these elements the whole would cease to exist as such. There cannot, for instance, be a poem with subject-matter but without form of any kind or without any sort of spirit. This is perhaps a truism.

<sup>2</sup> Some writers, as for instance Mr Arthur Symonds in his *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*, prefer the term 'poetical substance.'

<sup>3</sup> A note on metre, rhythm, and the distinction between prose and verse will be found at the end of Part I.

though to belie the need of it? Has not Hazlitt given it as his opinion that "the *Iliad* does not cease to be poetry in a literal translation"? And what of the poetry of the Bible? Let us essay an answer. And first as to Walt Whitman and whatever emulators he may have.<sup>1</sup> I do not wish to deny him or them the name of poet, nor yet the possession of poetic talent. Nor would I assert that their compositions are without certain poetic qualities. But that they are poetry in the proper and primary sense of the word I cannot admit. They are rather a species of hybrid prose;<sup>2</sup> they are prose masquerading in the outward semblance of poetry—its lines cut into varying lengths, its figures and turns of speech, and the rest.<sup>3</sup> However, there is nothing to hinder us from calling their writings poems, for lack of a better name. Ought we then to banish from the realm of poetry the entire tribe of the writers of *vers libre*? We must discriminate. There is a *vers libre* which is but verse written in irregular metres, with varying line lengths and so on. It is the form of the choruses in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, of some of Matthew Arnold's best-known poems, and was used by Coventry Patmore, W. E. Henley, and others. Such poets have not set at naught the laws of this kingdom, nor can they be held

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Norah Hopper's curious little *Ballads in Prose* or Baudelaire's *Petits Poèmes en Prose*. The *genre* is becoming more and more common.

<sup>2</sup> "Poetic prose," wrote Schlegel, "springs from poetic impotence: it tries to unite the prerogatives of prose and poetry, missing the perfection of both." And Professor Saintsbury, surely a great authority, speaks of the poem in prose as "that pestilent heresy."

<sup>3</sup> "It is certain," says a writer in the *Poetry Review* for August 1919, "that poetry divorced from metre, as in the case of Walt Whitman, becomes an absurdity." But I am quite aware that not a few respectable authorities might be quoted for the opposite view.



as outlaws. But there is a *vers libre* which affects to discard all the laws of the realm of poetry. Its votaries cast off all restraints of form and of design. Now something in the nature of design is surely essential in the fine arts. Abandonment of all metre, even irregular, leaves the work without design, formless, or with no other form than that of prose. Such versifiers would seem to have renounced their citizenship in the authentic realm of poetry. May they not have founded a new and legitimate principality, the principality of cadence, as one of its adepts has named it? It may well be. It would be rash to deny them a future, arbitrary to ban them wholly from the realms of literature.

As to prose translations of poetry, we may venture to differ from even such an authority as Hazlitt. Are we to say of the particular volume of, let us suppose, Kelly's "Keys to the Classics" that contains the works of Horace, "This is a book of poetry"? No, it is translated poetry, if you will; it is no longer poetry. The *Rubáiyát* is poetry, Pope's *Homer* and Dryden's *Virgil* may be poetry; Leaf, Lang, and Myers' *Iliad*, however poetical, is not poetry. Then there is the Bible. If there be question of the Revised or Authorized Versions of the English Bible, I should say of them what I have said of translations in general. True, the English Bible is a masterly and at times highly poetic translation, but surely it is a masterpiece of English prose, not of English poetry.<sup>1</sup> As to the Hebrew original (I speak of the Old Testament), the poetry it contains has all the elements of versification—metre, stanza form, refrain, alliteration, occasional

<sup>1</sup> See the thoughtful essay on "The Poetry of the Old Testament" in R. H. Hutton's *Literary Essays*. For the opposite view see Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, *The Art of Writing*, p. 53.

rhyme—and over and above these an element, almost peculiar to Semitic literature, known as parallelism, a poetic device whereby in the second line of a couplet the thought of the first is repeated in different terms. This device, giving as metre does the sense of a repeated pattern, would doubtless suffice to give a distinctive form for the expression of the poetic spirit. The Bible, then, in no sense falls outside our law.<sup>1</sup>

There seem, then, to be good grounds for the view, which so long prevailed universally, that metre is distinctive of poetry, essential to poetry. No metre, no poetry—using the term poetry in its proper and literal sense.<sup>2</sup>

But has metre no further function than this—to serve as a distinction? Is it a mere convention arbitrarily chosen to mark off one type of literary composition from others? It is much more than that. It is *of its nature* fitted to be the medium of that form of expression which we call poetry. If not so fitted, it were indeed a thing of naught. This natural fitness of metre for poetic expression cannot be fully understood without study of the poetic spirit. This shall presently be described, but meanwhile let us see how, historically, metre and poetry came to be associated.

What was the origin of poetry? How did it first arise? What was its most primitive form? The matter has been investigated with much learning and thoroughness,

<sup>1</sup> Sir George Adam Smith, *The Early Poetry of Israel*, 1912. R. P. Condamin, S.J., *Le livre de Jérémie*, introduction.

<sup>2</sup> "The theory that versification is not an essential requisite of a poem seems to have become nearly obsolete in our time," wrote Theodore Watts-Dunton a few years ago; but the theory has been taken up again of late by more than one writer.

notably by Professor F. H. Gummere.<sup>1</sup> The latter has summarized the results of previous inquirers, so that I need but record his conclusions. These are drawn from three principal sources: first, what can be gathered from the observation of primitive man in our own and recent times; secondly, the witness of ancient literatures—Hebrew and Homeric literature, for instance, as to their own epoch; thirdly, what these literatures tell us about times more ancient still. From such evidence it would seem that, at first, song, dance, and musical accompaniment were scarcely separated.<sup>2</sup> And all three had a deep significance in the life of the people. They were not mere amusements for leisure hours, but marked the emotion of some national, or at all events communal, occasion—a pæan of battle, a dirge for the slain, a hymn to the gods. Some writers have sought a common origin of all such ceremonies and have called it the ‘ballad-dance.’ But there is no need to seek a single starting-point: they arose, like so many other institutions, out of various needs of human nature. Even among peoples long civilized there are many survivals of such primitive songs—the lullaby must surely be as old as the world, so must the sailors’ chanties and boat-songs (*barcarolles*), the soldiers’

<sup>1</sup> Especially in his works *The Beginnings of Poetry* (N.Y.: Macmillan and Co.), 1901, and *Democracy and Poetry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.), 1911. In the former work (pp. 30-115) there is an exhaustive discussion of the subject. “Regular rhythm,” he says, “stands out as the one fact about savage poetry to which nearly all evidence of ethnology gives assent.” Again: “The poem now laboriously wrought at the desk goes back to the rhythm of work or play or dance in the life of primitive man, and the element of rhythm is the one tie that binds beginning and end; if poetry denies rhythm it denies itself.”

<sup>2</sup> “La poésie primitive était inséparable de la musique et de la danse”: V de Laprade, *Questions d’art et de morale*.



marching songs, the peasants' occupation songs.<sup>1</sup> There are places in Spain where it is still the custom solemnly to dance before the altar. In all such primitive songs we have the same elements: rhythmic motions, accompanied by chanted words, generally with repetitions and refrains, and often by some musical instrument—in other words, regular rhythm in three forms, separable but united.

United they emerge from the mists of pre-history, and united they continue far into historical times. Prayers, hymns, songs of victory, laments continued to be chanted with rhythmic motions to the sound of instruments. Gradually words more carefully composed took the place of primitive cries and repeated exclamations, gradually the putting together of such words came to be entrusted to a special class—bard, minstrel, poet, skilled to utter the common emotion of the hour in fitting lays.

And not alone in the poetry that gave voice to the great human emotions—the poetry since named lyric<sup>2</sup> and elegiac—was rhythm of voice and instrument and body combined with chanted words. Epic poetry, the telling of the mighty deeds of heroes, was sung to the accompaniment of instruments and, we may well suppose, of gestures and rhythmic motions. The great dramatic poetry of Greece retained in its chorus—the very word means dance—the original union of the three forms of rhythm.

But a time came when the dance ceased to be so closely

<sup>1</sup> Such as harvesting, vine-dressing, spinning, corn-milling. There are specimens of Gaelic occupation songs in Dr Hyde's *Religious Songs of Connaught* and in Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*.

<sup>2</sup> That is, originally, "composed for the lyre," the harp of the Greek world.

bound up with occasions of solemnity or of common emotion, and sufficed by itself for a new purpose of simple merry-making. But poetry continued to be sung to lyre or cithara or pipes of Pan. The greater part of Greek lyrical poetry—the odes of Pindar, for instance—was so sung. And so from primitive folk-song to highly-wrought choric ode the poem was written for the music of the voice. At what precise period or from what motives poets began to write poems for *reading* rather than for singing is perhaps to some extent a matter of conjecture. But it is certainly natural to suppose that they came gradually to set a higher value on the intellectual, the literary values of their artistic achievement, and so to begrudge that share of their listeners' attention which was claimed by the music, with its purely emotional and sensuous appeal.<sup>1</sup> Poetry then became a mode of literary expression distinct from song. Prose had yet to come. For prose, as used for distinctive literary purposes, was a later development, an afterthought, as it were. Each form preserved the character of its origin. Prose was at the outset written speech<sup>2</sup>—a record of the spoken word. But poetry was written song, and could never, without belying its nature, wholly forget that it was sprung from music: though the

<sup>1</sup> "La musique par essence est vouée à l'expression purement passionnelle, sentimentale" (Sully-Prudhomme, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1897, Sept.-Oct., p. 601). "Musical tones have in themselves no meaning appreciable by the human intellect" (Sidney Lanier, *Music and Poetry*). "Poetry surpasses music because it carries its explanation, whereas the meaning of a concerto has to be interpreted into dull words on a programme" (Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, *Poetry*). Therefore if at the sound of music the intellect moves, that is in virtue of some association, extraneous to the sound, with words, events—anything, in short, that calls up an idea.

<sup>2</sup> Though since artistically developed into something more elaborate, with a certain gait and rhythm of its own.



music be silent, the verse never forgets it. "Always," says Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, "always you must come back to this, that the first poets sang their words to the harp or some such instrument ; and just there lies the secret why poetry differs from prose."<sup>1</sup> But harp or no harp, poetry and the music of that wonderful musical instrument, the voice, at the outset made but one.<sup>2</sup> And so poetry still continues, as Hazlitt says, "to combine the ordinary use of language with musical expression." That is, poetry keeps as much of its one-time appeal to the ear as is compatible with its new condition. Metre, rime, alliteration, assonance preserve the memory of music—nay, themselves make music. "Poetry," says Mr W. B. Yeats, "is the utilisation of language as the handmaid of Music." Is it not truer to say that the spirit of poetry, the poetry of the soul, takes as its handmaid whatever of music unsung language can keep for poetry's service ?

The phrase just quoted from Mr Yeats suggests what I will venture to call the exaggeration, in a recent school of poetry, of the musical element in poetry, an exaggeration which finds definite expression in the well-known lines of Paul Verlaine, beginning :

De la musique avant toute chose,

and ending on the same note :

De la musique encore et toujours,  
Que ton vers soit la chose envolée  
Qu'on sent qui fuit d'une âme en allée  
Vers d'autres cieux, à d'autres amours.

<sup>1</sup> *The Art of Writing*, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Keble calls music and poetry "twin sisters" (*Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, vol. i. p. 47). Edgar Allan Poe speaks of the "certainty that music in its various modes of metre, rhythm, and rime is of so vast a moment in poetry as never to be wisely rejected."

Not without reason has the poem been called *l'art poétique des décadents*. The excess is due to a general contempt for precision of thought and to a sort of world-weariness that seeks repose from haunting problems in the sweetness of mere sensation. It is not without surprise that I read in such an upholder of the intellectual dignity of poetry as Principal Shairp the following: "It is a sad divorce that has long been made between poetry and song. We shall never know the full power of Poetry till she has wandered back to her original home, and found there her long-severed sister Music." Would not such return be a retrogression rather than a progress?

Historically, then, if our theory be true, the spirit of poetry has chosen for its organ not the language of everyday speech but the language of song.<sup>1</sup>

There are other points of view from which we may observe the interconnexions between poetry and metrical expression or versification. A consideration of them presupposes, as I have said, some notion of the inner nature of poetry. Yet it may be helpful briefly to summarize them here.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I can but mention in passing a suggestive and perhaps pregnant theory first fully set forth by Thomas MacDonagh in his little book *Thomas Campion and the Art of English Poetry* (1912). It is that there are, broadly speaking, two species of verse, one of which, speech-verse, grew out of unsung speech, the other, song-verse, out of song. Such verse as Milton's and Shakespeare's blank verse and the heroic couplet would belong to the former species. But if, as seems probable, even speech-verse was originally *chanted* (as distinguished from *sung*), the theory I have set forth would not be notably impaired by the acceptance of Mr MacDonagh's.

<sup>2</sup> They have been amply treated in a recently published volume entitled *Essays on Poetry*, by the Rev. Professor Geo. O'Neill, S.J., M.A. (Dublin: Talbot Press), 1919.

(1) First there is the point of view of language. The speech of every day with its harshnesses, its discords, its breaks and jerks, or, as Coleridge describes it, "its abruptness, petty obstacles, discordant flats and sharps," is unfitted to be the vehicle of an art akin to music. The poet's art fashions, moulds, and modulates it, sets its syllables lilting in measured cadences, tunes it to the music of verse. Yet it may be that every separate word he so fits into his measures has been chosen from the language that men talk. What matters is the *choice* with an eye to beauty of sound and sense.

(2) Poetry, as has already been said, is an art. The medium of this art is language. In the endeavour of any art to express the beautiful it must so use its medium—the pigments of the painter, the stone of the sculptor, the words of the poet—as to draw from that medium the highest effect of beauty of which it is capable.<sup>1</sup> Poetry, therefore, cannot ignore that power of producing beautiful effects which language possesses when it uses the resources of music. "Fine art, in this as in all other things, imitates the method of Nature and makes its most beautiful works out of materials that are themselves beautiful. So that even if the difference between verse and prose consisted only in measure, that difference would already be analogous to that between jewels and clay."<sup>2</sup> A piece of literary work cast in metrical form gives a sense of perfection, of completeness, and of permanence which prose does not of itself possess.

<sup>1</sup> This, I believe, is the bearing of Leigh Hunt's remark that "poetry without the fit structure of verse is no more to be called poetry than beauty conceived is beauty accomplished." Walt Whitman gives us not a work of art but the raw materials of one.

<sup>2</sup> George Santayana, *Poetry and Religion*, p. 252.



Again, poetry as an art cannot well disdain the æsthetic *pleasure* that its music can impart.<sup>1</sup> For in the arts beauty is, as Sully-Prudhomme has described it, "l'agréable [the *pleasing*] en tant qu'expressif de l'idéal."

(3) There is, perhaps, a deeper reason for the appeal of metre to the æsthetic side of us. It lies in the fact that a metrical form is a pattern to which the poet conforms in the main while overlaying it or disguising it with endless variations. The reader's pleasure arises in part from the feeling of a difficulty ever present and ever skilfully overcome, in part from the sense of variety in unity or of symmetry in variety—the variety of the poet's rhythms embroidered upon his uniform pattern of metre.<sup>2</sup> And such pleasure, for those whose ears are well attuned, is increased when the poet pushes his variations as far as he dare without breaking away wholly from the type. Is not this pleasure akin to that we take in "variations" by a musical composer upon some familiar melody? Let us take an example almost at random from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*:

"Nay," said the knight; "for no such passion mine.  
But the sweet vision of the Holy Grail  
Drove me from all vainglories, rivalries,  
And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out  
Among us in the jousts, while women watch  
Who wins, who falls; and waste the spiritual strength  
Within us, better offer'd up to Heaven."

If we take line four as conforming to the pattern—five beats or accents, each preceded by an unaccented syllable—it is easy to see how many variations the poet

<sup>1</sup> For metre is, as Hegel calls it, "the one and only sensuous aroma [*Duft*]," and therefore, he thinks, more necessary even than store of imagery or beautiful diction.

<sup>2</sup> See note at end of Part I.

introduces, without destroying our sense that there is a pattern.

(4) Poetry speaks the language of feeling, of emotion. Now rhythm, as De Quincey says, and as experience may tell us, "is both a cause of impassioned feeling, an ally of such feeling, and a natural result of it." It is first a *result*. That is, impassioned feeling naturally<sup>1</sup> seeks an outlet in rhythmical motion and sound (articulate or not), and rhythmic language is in harmony with such a mood, at least while the passion is in some degree controlled. Again, it is a *cause*. Metre, as a form of music, makes appeal to the feelings, imbues words with an emotional power. It serves to call forth or to foster many various moods, whether it be warlike excitement or gentle melancholy. But its true function is not to kindle the fiercer or the bitterer passions. Rather it soothes them, if they will but suffer its "soft control." For the poet "puts men's sorrows into such large speech and music as to rob them of their meaner pain."

(5) Poetry moves most at ease in the world of the ideal. Now the very use of verse serves of itself to lift up our thoughts into a world apart from the prosaic concerns of daily life. Of our work, our commonplace affairs, our material needs we speak in prose. "But when," says Emerson, "we rise into the world of thought and think of these things only for what they signify, speech refines into order and harmony." And Hegel in his *Ästhetik* writes: "Metre shows that one is in another realm from the realm of prose, of daily life." A study of Shakespeare's alternate use of verse and prose teaches

<sup>1</sup> As may be observed especially in children and savages—natures unsophisticated and spontaneous.

one much about their respective values in expressing the various aspects of life.

Something must now be said about the devices other than metre whereby language keeps the memory, the aroma, of music. The chief sound-devices of this kind are rime, alliteration, assonance, and the various devices whereby the sound is made to echo the sense. Of these little need here be said because they do not fall within the definition of poetry as an element essential to verse. They are only added embellishments, but they help toward what is the immediate though not the ultimate aim of poetry, as of all art—the giving of æsthetic pleasure.

The appeal of *rime* as a pleasurable sensation to the ear is even a more obvious one than that of rhythm, and it is a sensation to which the ears of most of us, in these countries at least, have grown accustomed from the days of childhood with its ‘nursery rhymes.’

Rime in general, then, needs no exemplification, but it may be of interest to give an example of *internal* rimes. The following is a *tour de force* composed by Thomas MacDonagh as an illustration of the views on rime set forth in his book, *Thomas Campion and the Art of English Poetry* :

Now noon is far, the dusk more narrow grows ;  
 And soon a star will hush the sparrow's din,  
 And fold them *all* the stooping eaves within :  
 Then cold will fall with drooping leaves the rose.  
 The lilac flowers will drink the dew and close,  
 And silent hours will link anew and spin  
 The world and thought round seasons of repose.

To French verse rime is practically indispensable,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “La rime est, dans notre versification, une question capitale. De toutes les langues dérivées du latin, la langue française est, en effet, la seule où les vers sans rime n'aient pu s'acclimater.” (F. de Gramont, *Le vers français*.)



for French verse is purely syllabic : it lacks on the one hand the quantities of Greek and Latin verse and on the other that pronounced beat which forms the measure of verse in Teutonic tongues. But so little is rime indispensable to English verse that many of the finest poems in English literature have been written in rimeless or blank verse. One might name at random Shakespeare's plays, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Wordsworth's *Excursion*, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, and (in metres different from all these) Longfellow's *Hiawatha* and *Evangeline*. In recent poetry there is a movement against the use of rime. The exponents of the advanced school denounce it as "a silly ornament, that is, no ornament at all—a toy trinket added to poetry"; and as "a nuisance to the ear of a reader educated to appreciate the essential qualities of poetry."<sup>1</sup>

As Anglo-Irish verse often borrows its tone and, as it were, its gait from Gaelic poetry, a word may here be said about Gaelic rime. "The Irish," says Dr Sigerson, a high authority in this matter, "introduced rhyme into European literature. . . . But they did far more than the word now suggests. They made it the most refined and most delicate instrument of artistic structure which the ingenuity of human intelligence could invent to charm, without fatiguing, the ear by the modulation of sound. They avoided in Gaelic the tinkle of repeated words regularly recurring at the ends of lines. They had echoes and half echoes of broad and slight vowels, and of consonants, differentiated into classes so that it was not necessary to repeat

<sup>1</sup> From the twelfth of Mr F. S. Flint's fourteen "Axioms," published in *Three Critical Essays on Modern English Poetry*, March 1920.

even the same letter, and these echoing sounds . . . came at varied intervals, not merely at the close but within and between the lines. They constitute word-music."<sup>1</sup> In his beautiful book from which the above is taken Dr Sigerson gives in translation many examples from the most ancient Irish poetry of elaborate rime-devices.

But the Irish ear never demanded what in English prosody is called perfect rime, viz., a rime in which the riming words should have not only the same vowel sound but also the same consonant sound after the vowel, *e.g.* the single rimes 'meed' and 'deed' or the double rimes 'grateful' and 'fateful.' In Irish rime the consonants following the vowel-sounds must belong to the same class, *p t f* or *b d v*, but that is enough. Thus sounds like fate and cape would rime, but not shade and cape. The appreciation of such rimes is merely a matter of ear-training. To an ear trained in 'perfect' rimes there is a disappointment of expectation.<sup>2</sup>

In English this would be a form of *assonance*, a name given to a general similarity in vowel sounds independent of the consonants; thus 'plaint' and 'wail,' 'charming' and 'blarney.' Assonance is a feature of Spanish poetry and has been employed by a few English writers, such as Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. But it has not yet become acclimatized in English literature. One example may

<sup>1</sup> Dr Sigerson, *Bards of the Gael and Gall*. It is well to mention that more recent Irish scholarship inclines to the view that rime came into Irish verse from the early Latin hymns of the age of St Ambrose. But ancient Irish would seem to have been the first European non-classical language to make use of rime in its literature.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted for the substance of the two preceding paragraphs to the Rev. J. MacErlean, S.J. For a fuller account of Irish versification see *Irish Metrics*, by Kuno Meyer.

suffice. It is from George Eliot's "Song of Juan" in *The Spanish Gipsy* :

Maiden crowned with glossy blackness  
 Lithe as panther forest roaming  
 Long-armed næd, when she dances,  
 On the stream of ether floating,—  
 Bright, O bright Fedalma.

Alliteration, the repetition at intervals of the same letter, is an ancient device of style, prose style as well as poetic. It was the basis of Anglo-Saxon verse, and Gaelic verse is full of it. Modern writers have developed its resources. They no longer confine themselves to the repetition of initial consonants. They repeat the consonants at the beginning of one word and in the middle of the next, or in the middle of one word and at the end of another. Again, instead of repeating the same consonant they echo it by a consonant of the same class : d and t, p and b, f and v answer one another at intervals. This, by the way, is characteristic of the oldest Gaelic verse. Only the more obvious of its effects can be reproduced in an English translation. Here are two samples from a poem of the Cuchulainn period :

Stately stands the charioteer,  
 Beardless, young who *hasteth here*.  
 Splendid o'er the plain he speeds  
 His *careering* chariot steeds.

In the following notice also the internal rhymes :

Blood drips from his *lofty lance*,  
 In his *glance gleams battle fire* ;  
*Haughty, high* the victor goes,  
 Woe to those who *wake his ire*.

Shakespeare, not only in his lyrics but throughout

his plays, makes use of alliteration, but always sparingly and unobtrusively. The following is from one of his songs :

O mistress mine, where are you roaming ?  
O stay and hear ; your true love's coming,  
That can sing both high and low.

And this, from one of his sonnets, is an even more striking example :

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past,  
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste.

Tennyson is the great master of this as of all other devices of word-music :

Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans  
Nor sound of human sorrow mounts.

Note how the alliteration of similar consonants and the repeated open vowels combine to produce an effect which harmonizes perfectly with the meaning. Swinburne's poetry is perhaps over-embellished with such sound-devices : the sweetness cloy. In the following fine stanza from *Love in the Valley*, by George Meredith, the device just stops short of being overdone :

Shy as the squirrel and wayward as the swallow,  
Swift as the swallow along the river's light  
Circling the surface to meet his mirrored winglets,  
Fleeter she seems in her stay than in her flight.  
Shy as the squirrel that leaps among the pine-tops,  
Wayward as the swallow overhead at set of sun,  
She whom I love is hard to catch and conquer,  
Hard, but O the glory of the winning were she won

*Onomatopœia*, whereby the language is made by its



sounds to reflect the meaning it conveys, is assuredly no new device : it is found in Homer already carried to high perfection. The meaning of such a line as this could almost be guessed from the mere sound of it :

Δεινὴ δὴ κλαγγὴ γέενετ' ἀργυρεοῖο βιοῖο.—*Iliad*

In shrill-toned murmurs sang his twanging bow.

Virgil uses it to good effect, as in the following, describing a lance hurled at the wooden horse of Troy. Pronounce the *ae* like *ah-ee* :

Contorsit. Stetit illa tremens, uteroque recusso  
Insonuere cavæ gemitumque dedere cavernæ.

*Æneid*, ii. 53

In the two following lines the hoof-beats of a horse are imitated :

Ῥίμφα ἐ γούνα φέρει μετὰ τ' ἤθεα καὶ νομὸν ἵππων.<sup>1</sup>

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.

VIRGIL

Any language can produce these effects. Here are two French examples :

The sound of rain on a carriage: *Je m'endormis au grignotement de la pluie sur la capote de ma calèche*.—CHATEAUBRIAND

The roaring of a lion: *Le rugissement du lion rauque et caverneux comme un écho dans un aqueduc*.—FLAUBERT

As examples in English one might take Tennyson's lines, hackneyed now by repetition :

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,  
And murmuring of innumerable bees.

Or :

The league-long roller thundering on the reef.

Or :

Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans.

<sup>1</sup> This comes at the end of a very fine description of a horse in the sixth book of the *Iliad*.



A less well-known example is this from Keats's *Hyperion* :

So far her voice flow'd on, like timorous brook  
That, lingering along a pebbled coast,  
Doth fear to meet the sea : but sea it met,  
And shuddered, for the overwhelming voice  
Of huge Enceladus swallow'd it in wrath :  
The ponderous syllables, like sullen waves  
In the half-glutted hollows of reef rocks,  
Came booming thus.

Such more obvious effects are seldom sought in the delicate and subtle music of modern poetry. And such excesses in the deliberate seeking of verbal effects as Poe's *The Bells* and Southey's *The Cataract of Lodore* are not—unless as *jeux d'esprit*—in accordance with good taste, whether ancient or modern. More often the tone of modern verse suggests unobtrusively not so much a definite sound as the mood of the poet, the emotion breathed into his poetry. We feel the trembling hesitation in the rhythm of

First as in fear, step after step, she stole  
Down the long tower stairs hesitating.

Peacefulness is suggested in such a line as this :

Mourir en ciselant dans l'or un encensoir.

There is a languid restfulness in the swaying rhythm of these lines :

Our motion on the soft, still, misty river  
Is like rest and like the hours of doom  
That rise and follow one another ever ;  
Ghosts of sleeping battle-cruisers loom  
And languish quickly in the liquid gloom.

A mood of gaiety expresses itself in verses

Frisking light in frolic measures.

While in sadness the verse moves slowly and heavily :

And ghastly through the drizzling rain  
On the bald street breaks the blank day.

Not content with marking and enjoying these effects, one would do well to study how they are produced. For they are not all produced by the same means. At one time they are due to selection and combination of certain vowel and consonant sounds, at another to choice of onomatopœic words, at another to rhythmical arrangements. In the ideal poem these various means would all concur, harmoniously attuned, all of them, to the poet's mood and the tone of his subject.

Of all such sound-effects Tennyson is master. For the training of the ear in the music of verse the study of his poetry is invaluable.

#### (b) Diction. The "Fine Art of Words "

The other element of poetic form is diction, that is to say, that department of style which has to do with words, with the choice of language. Here we enter upon a one-time battleground of the critics. The question at issue was the right of what is called poetic diction to a place in the realm of poetry. In the year 1800 Wordsworth published along with his *Lyrical Ballads* a now famous preface. It was a long and formidable attack upon poetic diction. Poetry, he said, was but prose with the charm of metrical language superadded. Between poetry and prose, metre is the sole distinction, but it is distinction enough. Poetic diction is a needless and even harmful incrustation, a mere stock-in-trade clung to as the cloak for poverty of thought. He would discard all such "arbitrary

and capricious habits of expression." He would go further. Not only would he write his poems in "a selection of language really used by men," he would select that language from the daily speech of the humbler classes, but "purified from what appear to be its real defects." But Wordsworth's poetic genius was too great to be imprisoned within such straitened bounds: his practice broke through them at all points. And for the theory, it is not too much to say that Coleridge a few years later finally demolished it.<sup>1</sup> No doubt there is a false poetic diction as there is a false prose diction. If you have in poetry the stiffness and formality of the classical school and the extravagances of the metaphysical, you have in prose the preciousness of a Lyly, the quaintness of a Fuller, and ponderous Latinism of a Hooker or a Johnson. In rejecting all such affected mannerisms and worn-out conventionalities for a fresh and natural diction Wordsworth assuredly did well. But, for all his theory, he but seldom succeeded in attaining his ideal of metrified prose, and when he did succeed he ceased to write poetry.

The fact is that, leaving for the moment out of consideration what we have called the spirit of poetry, the mere use of metre imposes on a writer a diction that is not the diction of prose.<sup>2</sup> Metre compels inversions,

<sup>1</sup> Here is Coleridge's own emphatic conclusion: "Lastly, I appeal to the practice of the best poets of all countries and in all ages, as authorizing the opinion (deduced from all the foregoing) that in every import of the word essential . . . there may be, is, and ought to be an essential difference between the language of prose and of metrical composition." (*Biographia Literaria*.)

<sup>2</sup> "To talk, as Wordsworth inadvertently does, of rhyme and metre being *superadded* is assuredly a grave error; for the poem would be an essentially different thing without it" (E. de Sélincourt, *The Study of Poetry*, 1918). "If metre be superadded,"

condensations, special constructions not admissible in prose. Thus, speaking of *early* Hebrew poetry—more ancient than anything we possess in the classical languages—Sir George Adam Smith writes: “It is distinguished by the obvious signs by which in all literatures the form of poetry is distinguished from that of prose: to wit, an order of the words of a sentence different from the order normal in prose; numerous ellipses and compressions, and a preference for archaic words and forms of words.”<sup>1</sup> Even in the case of vocabulary it seems clear that the poet is, owing to the limitations imposed on him by metre, rime, and the other requirements of musical expression, forced into a more fastidious choice of language than would be quite according to good taste in prose. “The moment you introduce music,” says Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, “you let in emotion with all its sway upon speech. From that moment you change everything down to the order of the words—the *natural* order of the words.” Nor can he well eschew special poetic words and special forms of familiar words that have become the heritage of English poetry while in prose they are out of place—*dépaysés*, as it were. They have, from the law of association, a savour and a suggestiveness not belonging to the corresponding prose words. One has but to compare, say, ‘ancient mariner’ with its prose equivalent, ‘old sailor,’ or a line such as “Absent thee from felicity awhile” with “Put off your happiness a little.” Even an isolated poetic

says Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*, “all other parts must be made consonant with it.” And Walter Bagehot remarks that “poetry, because it has a more marked rhythm than prose, must be more intense in meaning and more concise in style than prose” (*Literary Essays*).

<sup>1</sup> *The Early Poetry of Israel*, 1912, p. 12.



word may fulfil a function not to be fulfilled by its prose equivalent. Thus :

“ ‘Bring forth the horse!’—the horse was brought;  
In truth, he was a noble *steed*.”

More often it is the whole pitch or key of language that is poetic, rather than special words. For in poetry words are the material of a fine art.

And when we take into consideration the *spirit* of poetry the case for poetic diction is greatly strengthened. For if, as I hope to make clear, the spirit and genius of poetry, its outlook on life, and its aims, are different from those of prose, it is inevitable that such a difference should make itself felt in the language chosen to express their respective spirit, genius, outlook, and aims. And if this is what is to be expected antecedently, a superficial examination of average prose and average poetry ought to bring one to the same conclusion. Not that the two dictions do not interact, for there is a constant approach of prose in the direction of poetry, and poets must at times speak almost the language of everyday life. Yet the two dictions maintain on the whole their different characteristics. According to one of the best writers on English prose,<sup>1</sup> “The first rule in good prose writing is this: not to be poetical.” It is a rule, indeed, that has been flouted by writers so excellent in their way as Carlyle<sup>2</sup> and Francis Thompson, yet it is a rule which not one writer in a hundred can afford to flout. For, to name but a few characteristic differences, good prose will be found to be sparing in

<sup>1</sup> Earle, *English Prose*, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> But Professor Earle holds strongly that Carlyle’s diction is not poetic. His may be “wild or furious, enthusiastic, spasmodic, or dithyrambic prose, but we cannot deny it the name of Prose.”



its epithets where poetry is lavish—sobriety is good taste in prose ; it will avoid certain old and uncommon words (archaisms) which poetry will welcome. For example, as Professor Earle says rightly, the young prose writer should not write brethren for brothers, should not call a horse a charger, or a palfrey, or a steed ; should not write welkin for sky, or whilome for once, or ere for before, or vale for valley, and so on. Yet in verse even Wordsworth would not scruple to use such words. Again, prose cannot, without belying its character, allow itself that condensed and elliptical style which is natural to poetry. Lastly, poetry uses systematically and consciously, because they are its congenial mode of speech, those turnings aside from the beaten tracks of language which are called tropes, and, where prose uses imagery occasionally and for definite purposes, poetry spontaneously and habitually bodies forth its ideas in concrete images.<sup>1</sup> The reason of these differences will be apparent when we have studied the spirit of poetry.

## 2. SUBJECT-MATTER OR THEMES OF POETRY

Here we can be brief, for when we ask ourselves what are the subjects of poetry we find that from its scope scarcely anything is shut out. There are the germs of poetry in all things, could man but see them. "There is no thought or feeling that can have entered into the mind of man which he would be eager to communicate to others, or which they would listen to with delight, that is not a fit subject for poetry." So says the critic Hazlitt, and the claims of the poets themselves are more boundless still. "The objects of the poet's thoughts,"

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Spencer in his *Philosophy of Style*, § 4, attempts an explanation of the superiority of poetic over prose diction.

says Wordsworth, "are everywhere. . . . Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge." He even reaches out into the future and, in the name of poetry, lays hold on "the remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, and the Mineralogist" as capable of becoming "proper objects of the Poet's art."<sup>1</sup> The field claimed by Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry* is no less vast. It may be said that any subjects which can be written about at all are equally within the purview of prose and poetry.<sup>2</sup> But prose and poetry approach them from wholly different angles and look at them with very different eyes. It is then true to say, "There are no poetic subjects—there are, indeed, no artistic subjects, for art can find and reveal an aspect of beauty in everything that God has permitted to exist. It is not the thing but the saying that moves us, not the matter but the manner of its presentation."<sup>3</sup>

But when all is said, the subject-matter of poetry differs in one all-important respect from the subject-matter of prose, namely, that the subject in poetry is not so much the thing talked of as the poet's relation with that thing. It is that thing seen through his

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

<sup>2</sup> When Father Joseph Keating, S.J., in his essay on poetry and verse in *The Month*, May 1916, speaks of subjects that are "incapable of poetic treatment," I should not be inclined to agree with him that there are such. But he confesses further on in the same essay: "There are few things which have not an ideal aspect, and the prosiest of facts may be dragged into service as a foil or as a metaphor." Again, "For the purpose of enhancing the beauty which is his theme, the poet may at times describe what is commonplace or even unlovely."

<sup>3</sup> E. G. Lamborn, *Rudiments of Criticism*. "There is," says Principal Shairp, "no truth cognizable by man that may not shape itself into poetry" (*The Poetic Interpretation of Nature*).

temperament, idealized and transfigured by his imagination, emotionally realized in his sensitive being. A snow-flake is for perhaps the bulk of men just an undistinguished unit in that particular form of weather-nuisance, a fall of snow. For a scientist it is a crystal of water. In neither aspect is it a poetical subject. Caught up into the imagination of Francis Thompson this is what it becomes :

“ What heart could have thought you ?—

Past our devisal

(O filigree petal !)

Fashioned so purely,

Fragilely, surely,

From what Paradisal

Imagineless metal,

Too costly for cost ?

Who hammered you, wrought you,

From argentine vapour ?—”

“ God was my shaper.

Passing surmisal,

He hammered, He wrought me,

From curled silver vapour,

To lust of His mind :—

Thou couldst not have thought me !

So purely, so palely,

Tinily, surely,

Mightily, frailly,

Insculped and embossed,

With His hammer of wind,

And His graver of frost.”

*To a Snow-flake*

Broadly speaking we may say that the themes of poetry may be summed up as God, external nature, and man, and the numberless interrelations of these three.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Treatises on poetics usually deal under the heading ‘Subject-matter’ with the various types of poetry—epic, lyric, dramatic, and

## 3. THE SPIRIT OF POETRY

One thing about the spirit of poetry, as being plain and I think not controverted, I may at once set down. It is that poetry is an art, one of the fine arts.<sup>1</sup> It has been defined, truly though inadequately, as "the fine art of words." Now, being a fine art, its first and main concern is with beauty. As painting achieves beauty in form and colour, sculpture in form alone, music in sound, so poetry aims at the achievement of beauty by its own medium of expression—human language. Language must be wrought for the purposes of poetry into a form of beauty. What that form is in general we have seen already. But there is more. Form and spirit are indissolubly bound up with one another. It is through form and in form that the spirit lives at all: poetic form is the embodiment of the poetic spirit. If a poet is to express himself in beautiful form the spirit in which he treats his subject must surely have some relation to beauty. And it is so. To achieve that complete beauty which is the ideal of poetry, the poet must first see his subject in beauty—be it physical or moral or intellectual beauty (the beauty of truth)—

the other types that may be ranged under one or other of these main classes. They are amply described in *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*, by W. H. Hudson (Harrap), new edition, p. 125 and following.

<sup>1</sup> The application of skill to the perfection of craftsmanship in any form of activity may be called art. The term fine art is properly applied to the expression of the beautiful in some perceptible medium such as stone, metal, pigments, sounds, words. Thus when Mr Arthur Symons (*The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*, p. 5) says, "In its origin prose is in no sense an art, and it never has and never will become an art, strictly speaking, as verse is, or painting, or music," perhaps this "strictly speaking" is to be understood as meaning "in the sense of fine art."



and then, when the beauty of it has taken possession of his soul, he will endeavour to give to that vision of beauty expression worthy of it. All of us see glimpses of that beauty, for to even the least of us has been given a soul wrought in the image of Him who is the primal Beauty and the Author of all that is fair in nature and in the mind of man. But to the true poet has been given, not only a soul awake to all the beauty of the world, but the power to translate his vision into the beauty of human language. "Poetry," says Fiona MacLeod, "is the emotion of life rhythmically remembering beauty: as pictorial art and the art of verbal romance are the vision of life seen in beauty and in beauty revealed: and as music is the echo of life heard in beauty."<sup>1</sup> Poetry, then, is an art which expresses through the medium of beautiful speech the Beauty that is God and the reflection of It in man and nature. Beauty is its very soul.

And now let us approach the matter from another direction. There is an oft-quoted sentence of Wordsworth's<sup>2</sup> from which we may set out:

A primrose by a river's brim  
A yellow primrose was to him,  
And it was nothing more.

"And what more could it be?" says the matter-of-fact reader, not without mild surprise. Well, it is no more for your matter-of-fact man. And yet there are those to whom it may be something more, for there are two ways of looking at things. We may look at them as they are in themselves, as outward facts and no more. We can make our minds unclouded mirrors of reality, so that the image reflected there differs no more—

<sup>1</sup> *The Winged Destiny.*

<sup>2</sup> It is in *Peter Bell.*

the windows of sense being free from all distortion, discoloration, and dimness—from the real and actual appearances of naked reality than the mirrored object differs from its reflection.<sup>1</sup> That is one way of seeing things. It is the way the matter-of-fact man and the scientist see them. But there is another way, for we are not mere intellects. Things affect us as creatures of feeling and imagination as well as of understanding. To get at the plain truth of things the mind must ever make corrections to allow for the intermingling, with its data, of feeling and fancy. That is true. But there is a sense, too, in which the mind must ever be *adding* to its conclusions the data of emotion and imagination. For though what the intellect grasps in things is truth, it is not the whole truth. “Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas.” What our heart tells about things is part of the truth about them: what our imagination shows us of them is a part likewise. Now to speak to us about things as they are for our feelings and our imagination, as they appeal to that side of our nature, we have the language of poetry. When language is used to give expression to the emotional and imaginative view of life, it is used in the spirit of poetry. There is, therefore, in the spirit of poetry an emotional and there is an imaginative element. These two are intimately bound up with one another,<sup>2</sup> for in common

<sup>1</sup> Clearly I am here abstracting from the theories of the purely subjective philosophies.

<sup>2</sup> This interrelation of emotion and imagination is worked out in Ribot's *The Creative Imagination*, English translation, p. 31 *sqq.* Here he shows that on the one hand “all forms of the creative imagination imply elements of feeling,” and on the other that “all emotional dispositions whatever may influence the creative imagination.”

life it is the emotions that call the imagination into play, and it is the language of the imagination with its vivid pictures that has power to stir the emotions. And so we find Ruskin describing poetry as "the suggestion by the imagination of noble grounds for the noble emotions—Love, Veneration, Admiration, and Joy . . . and their opposites—Hatred, Indignation (or Scorn), Horror, and Grief." For Wordsworth poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," and the emotional element is clearly indicated by the third of the three famous adjectives whereby Milton set forth the qualities of poetry—"simple, sensuous, *passionate*."<sup>1</sup> Emotion in one form or another is familiar, everyday experience for all but the wholly stolid and phlegmatic. As for imagination, it is true that we cannot so much as think without it; yet, as the word has been used in various, and sometimes peculiar, senses by writers on poetry, I shall dwell somewhat upon the functions of this strange faculty of ours.<sup>2</sup>

The simplest function of the imagination and the most familiar would seem to be the calling up of *images*, pictures of things seen, reproductions of bygone experience. In this rôle it is little else but memory vividly recalling the past. We sit and muse with eyes half closed, and lo! the dead past gives up its dead—

<sup>1</sup> "The primary intention of prose," says a recent writer on poetics, "is to convey thought. Both verse and music have in view the awakening of emotion. Verse strives to awaken this emotion through the intellect and through the senses. Music makes its appeal to the senses." (Cary F. Jacob, *The Foundations and Nature of Verse*.)

<sup>2</sup> I have not followed Leigh Hunt's somewhat over-subtle sevenfold division of these functions, nor have I followed precisely Ruskin's threefold division.

dead no longer, but living with a sort of weird reality.  
Reverie gives one back

the touch of a vanished hand  
And the sound of a voice that is still.

Scenes that we have once lived 'flash,' as in Scrooge's Christmas dream, 'upon our inward eye,' and we live them once again. Landscapes, once familiar but long unvisited, can be called before us, as, in Moira O'Neill's poem, the weary exile called up the image of Lough-areema or of Corrymeela, as the scenery of the Wye haunted Wordsworth :

These beauteous forms,  
Through a long absence, have not been to me  
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye :  
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,  
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart.

Clearly the true poet's imagination is stored with such shapes of beauty.

In virtue of this power the poet can describe with the vividness of reality things seen and felt in the past. But there is more. His thoughts, even the most abstract, clothe themselves in concrete imagery. Victor Hugo had this gift to the highest degree, and often abused it by allowing his thought to lose itself in the torrent of images that presented themselves.<sup>1</sup>

But the imagination has a function yet more wonderful than this. It can seize upon the data of past experience, choose by some mysterious instinct what suits its purpose

<sup>1</sup> There is perhaps, even in poetry, no more wonderful example of this power of the imagination than Francis Thompson's essay on Shelley.



or its mood, and combine the elements it has chosen into new images. And this combination is not always a mere juxtaposition or a mere mixture, nor a mere selection of special features, such as a painter with very little imagination is capable of making ; it is something in the nature of a chemical combination or a mysterious alchemy whereby from the dross and debris of past sensation there issues the pure gold of some exquisite image. This has been not inaptly called a *creative* function of the faculty.<sup>1</sup> It is the imagination thus acting that makes our dreams, even such dreams as the "English Opium-Eater" has striven to imprison and preserve in human speech. But sleep is not a necessary condition of its exercise. Imagination gave us the enchanted island of *The Tempest*, the day-dream worlds through which Keats's Hyperion wandered, the Lotos-land of Tennyson's poem. The Yarrow Unvisited of Wordsworth's imagination was fairer even than the reality, like the imaginary landscape described in one of his odes :

A landscape more august than happiest skill  
Of pencil ever clothed with light and shade.

But in Shelley the creative imagination reaches its highest flight. He was "of imagination all compact." It is mainly this function of the poetic imagination that is described in these terms : "The great function of poetry is precisely this : to repair to the material of experience, seizing hold of the reality of sensation and fancy beneath the surface of conventional ideas,

<sup>1</sup> The essay by Ribot already referred to is, in the main, a study of this function of the imagination, though it is largely concerned also with the third function of the imagination, presently to be spoken of.

and then out of that living but indefinite material to build new structures richer, finer, fitter to the primary tendencies of our nature, truer to the ultimate possibilities of the soul." <sup>1</sup> This, moreover, reminds us that the imagination of the artist makes the choice and the combination, of which we have spoken, in view of beauty. From the gross and chaotic mass of sensations and images he gleans the beauty that is there, though often hidden. And then, if he be a poet truly great, from the countless imperfect beauties of the world he is led to conceive of a more perfect beauty than the world can show—may even be led to the feet of Him who is the Primal Beauty.

To the imagination has been attributed in literary criticism, chiefly since the days of Wordsworth and Coleridge, a function which many would prefer to name intellectual insight or intuition. It has been called the interpretative imagination because it pierces past the outer husk of things into their inner reality, which it interprets for the soul. It is the faculty that flashes to its goal past the cautious, slow advance of logic. It is either wildly wrong, or right with a penetration that reaches beyond reason. It sees behind the literal meaning of things their meaning for the soul. Not alone in literature but in politics,<sup>2</sup> philosophy, even in science, it plays its part, and its part is indispensable. But it is the special prerogative of the poet. By its virtue he sees in common things meanings which they have for his poet's mind and which he is privileged to reveal to the world. A common daisy for the gardener is just

<sup>1</sup> G. Santayana, *Religion and Poetry*, p. 267.

<sup>2</sup> It is not uncommon in these days to hear journalists complain of a ruler's "lack of imagination" in the government of a country.

a weed ; to the botanist, if he be only a botanist, it suggests only its scientific name and classification. For the poet it may have wonderful meanings—for Chaucer it is a crowned queen, for Burns a type of humble cheerfulness, for Wordsworth a living thing akin to man. Thus Wordsworth, of the familiar cuckoo :

Though babbling only to the Vale,  
Of sunshine and of flowers,  
Thou bringest unto me a tale  
Of visionary hours.

Thrice welcome, darling of the Spring !  
Even yet thou art to me  
No bird, but an invisible thing,  
A voice, a mystery.

And as in this very simple instance so in the sublimest—this imaginative insight reaches into the heart of things and seizes upon their inner meaning, not so much the meaning they have in their bare reality as the meaning they are capable of having for the mind as images and symbols of higher things. The mind of Christ saw in bird and beast and tree images of the Kingdom of God and symbols of eternity.<sup>1</sup>

There are, then, these two ways of looking at things—the imaginative-emotional and the matter-of-fact. Let us for the moment follow them out in the concrete. One way, I have said, is the way of matter-of-fact. It is also the way of that more accurate, reasoned, systematized matter-of-fact which we call science. Thus the science of meteorology has its way of viewing

<sup>1</sup> Mr Walter De la Mare, in a recent lecture on Rupert Brooke (Sidgwick and Jackson), 1919, has elaborated an interesting if subtle distinction between two types of imagination which he calls the visionary and the intellectual. Blake and Shelley are instances of the former, Donne and Meredith and Rupert Brooke of the latter.

a storm. It would express that view by velocity and direction of wind, height of barometer, and other such items. What it says about the storm is true, but there is a further truth which no such items can express for us, to express which the language of the imagination and the emotions must be invoked. Think of Dickens's storm off Yarmouth—prose, but wholly in the spirit of poetry—or Aubrey de Vere's storm in *Patrick on Cruachan*, or Byron's storm on Lake Lemman.<sup>1</sup> Again, "Let the naturalist, if he will, catch the glow-worm, carry it home with him in a box, and find it next morning nothing but a little grey worm ; let the poet or the lover of poetry visit it at evening, when beneath the scented hawthorn and the crescent moon it has built itself a palace of emerald light. This is also one part of nature, one appearance which the glow-worm presents, and that not the least interesting."<sup>2</sup> And we find that same little grey worm set like a jewel in one of the most perfect of poems. The lark singing unseen is :

Like a glow-worm golden  
In a dell of dew,  
Scattering unbeholden  
Its aëreal hue

Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view !

"Poetry," says Leigh Hunt,<sup>3</sup> "begins where matter of fact or of science ceases to be merely such, and begins to exhibit a further truth, the connection it has with the world of emotion, and its power to produce imaginative pleasure." Inquiring of a gardener, for instance, what flower it is we see yonder, he answers 'a lily.' This is

<sup>1</sup> *Childe Harold*, Canto III, Stanza 92.

<sup>2</sup> Hazlitt, *On Poetry in General*.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Hudson, *Introduction to the Study of Literature*, p. 99.



matter-of-fact. The botanist pronounces it to be of the order of *Hexandria monogynia*. This is matter of science. It is the 'lady' of the garden, says Spenser ; and here we begin to have a poetical sense of its fairness and grace. It is 'the plant and flower of light,' says Ben Jonson ; and poetry then shows us the beauty of the flower in all its mystery and splendour." A mountain, for the matter-of-fact, is a mere heap, so many feet high, of stone and earth. It may be of interest to the geologist for its stratification. To the poet—and who is not poet enough to have felt in some measure the mystery and grandeur of the mountains ?—it is something far other.

Thou communest up yonder, rapt from earth,  
Robed in the evening gold or morning mirth.

Behold above the storm as in a trance  
Thy grand, pale face abides regarding us,  
As from Death's realm afar, like risen Lazarus

Cloud chaos surges o'er a crest sublime  
That seems forked lightning spell-bound into stone.<sup>1</sup>

Again, of the sea and the things that dwell in it, oceanography and geography, conchology and ichthyology all have much to tell us. But some of the things they leave untold are among those that interest the common man most, and these are the subject-matter of poetry. Byron's *Address to the Ocean* brings home the grander aspects in a manner that pure science or mere matter of fact could never do. Or take these two prose examples of the sea's outward aspects :

"The sea was a jubilation of blue and white, with green in the shaken tents of the loud murmuring nomad host of billows. Southwards it was a dark tossing waste

<sup>1</sup> Roden Noel, *Monte Rosa*.

with long irregular dykes of foam that ran and merged when you looked at them, but were like broken walls on fields of black rye when you saw them only through the side of the eyes. S.W. and W. long splashes of red flame ruddied the wild sea and brought the black to blue." <sup>1</sup>

"We strolled down by the sea which to-day looked so calm and beautiful, its surface fluted with grooves where the sunlight reposed, and the coloured plaits of the waves weaving themselves lazily until they broke into the white lacework of sandy shoals." <sup>2</sup>

And, if poetry is the interpreter to us of nature felt in the glow of emotion, seen in the light of the imagination, so is it the interpreter of man. For if science with its facts and reasonings is limited in its power of expressing what is in nature, it is still more limited in the power of expressing what is in man. When vital statistics and anthropology and psychology and all the 'ologies' that deal with human nature have said their say—and enormously valuable their conclusions are—there is still much to be said, for there still remain the aspects in which the spirit of poetry looks at life, namely, the emotional and imaginative. In the eyes of the merely matter-of-fact man, of course, these aspects are negligible when they are not positively harmful. His concern is with facts, and facts have little to do with emotion or with imagination: facts are facts, whatever one may happen to feel or fancy about them. Yet after all emotion and imagination count for much in life. Is not imagination for one thing the instrument of that large sympathy which makes it possible for a man to

<sup>1</sup> Fiona MacLeod, *The Winged Destiny*.

<sup>2</sup> Canon Sheehan *My New Curate*.

identify himself with the joys and sorrows of fellow-men ? Must he not grasp imaginatively their case before he can feel with and for them ? And shall we quarrel with Shelley when he writes : " A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively ; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others ; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination " ? <sup>1</sup> True, where the imagination has gone before, the heart must follow, if real good is to result.

Let me now set out in a sort of tabular form these two ways of looking at things in general, premising that these two aspects seldom appear expressed in unmixed separateness.

*The poetic spirit.*

Sees things as they appear to the imagination and emotions.

Expresses even its loftiest thought in pictures and concrete images.

Is subjective, dealing with things as they relate to man and affect him.

Aims at the achievement of beauty and the production of æsthetic pleasure.

*The attitude of science and matter-of-fact.*<sup>2</sup>

Sees things as they are mirrored by the intellect.

Expresses itself in abstract statement of which the mathematical formula is the extreme type.

Is strictly objective, dealing with things as they are in themselves independently of man. It deals in *facts*.

Aims at utility and the attainment of abstract truth.

<sup>1</sup> *A Defence of Poetry.*

<sup>2</sup> Thus Cardinal Newman : " Poetry . . . is always the antagonist to science. . . . The two . . . belong respectively to two modes of viewing things which are contradictory to each other. Reason investigates, analyses, numbers, weighs, measures, ascertains, locates." (" The Mission of St Benedict," in *Historical Sketches*, ii.) The rest of the passage is admirable, and I should like to quote it all.

Now it will be seen at once that the contrast here is not between poetry and prose. In all great poetry there is, if I may so speak, a backbone of thought capable of at least approximate expression in scientific (*i.e.*, in this case, philosophic) language; while on the other hand prose with nothing of the poetic spirit would be bald, jejune, more than prosaic, unhuman, tolerable only in such compositions as are outside the realm of literature—scientific text-books, business hand-books, and the like. All the great scientific writers, even, to set forth their main ideas or to describe the objects of their science have borrowed much from the language of emotion and imagination and coloured their style with pictures and imagery. Much more is this so with prose whose spirit is not scientific but literary. We have the example of great writers before us to show how much prose without ceasing to be prose can catch up into itself of the purest poetic spirit. In various degrees prose may approach to the very confines of the realm of poetry.<sup>1</sup> The question arises naturally: "Why does it stop short, or rather why need the literary artist ever step across the frontier? Does a moment come when poetical form imposes itself, when prose ceases to be fit expression for the thoughts and fancies that throng his brain?" We who are not poets can but guess at the answer. There does seem to be a mood whose fittest expression is metrical language, a mood of heightened emotion, of spiritual exaltation, of inspiration in some true sense of the

<sup>1</sup> Such prose, for instance, as that of Coleridge, Shelley, Francis Thompson, Burke, Sir Thomas Browne, Ruskin, Carlyle, De Quincey, Milton, Emerson, Fiona MacLeod, Lamb, Dickens, Stevenson, George Eliot, Sidney. Contrast Addison, Swift, Macaulay, to name great writers only.



word,<sup>1</sup> in which the very thoughts themselves that seek expression shape themselves in rhythm. "Whenever any object of sense, or spectacle of the outer world, any truth of reason or event of past history, any fact of human experience, any moral or spiritual reality . . . comes home to one so as to touch him to the quick, to pierce him with a more than usual vividness and sense of reality, then is awakened that stirring of the imagination, that glow of emotion, in which Poetry is born."<sup>2</sup> Poetry that issues from such a mood is the music of language answering to the music of mind. More we cannot say.

#### 4. DEFINITIONS AND A DEFINITION

I may now, perhaps, with the help of what has been said, venture to put together some descriptive formula which may serve as a sort of definition. But in framing it the definitions or descriptions that have been from time to time given by critics and other men of letters must not be passed over. For in each of them, however incomplete, some aspect of the many-sided truth has been caught. They are false only if exclusive. Few were intended as formal, still less as scientific, definitions. For they were for the most part thrown out in passing, not achieved after careful analysis. Let us glance at a few of the more interesting.

I do not mean to go back any farther than Wordsworth, for, though much that is excellent had been written before the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, that

<sup>1</sup> As Cicero must have felt when he wrote in his *Tusculan Disputations* (i. 26): "Mihi quidem ne hæc quidem notiora et illustriora carere vi divina videntur, ut ego . . . poetam grave plenumque carmen sine cælesti aliquo mentis instinctu putem fundere."

<sup>2</sup> J. C. Shairp, *The Poetic Interpretation of Nature*.

challenging document was the starting-point of the modern criticism of English poetry. Wordsworth, as we have seen, contended that poetry differed from prose only by the superaddition of metre. We have seen how his practice disproved his theory and how Coleridge's criticism demolished it. Coleridge's own final definition he worded thus: "A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole as is compatible with a distinct gratification from the parts." It may be said of this formula that it distinguishes poetry from other things solely by the object at which it aims, which seems inadequate, and that though from the context the second part of the definition is intended to include metre and diction, this does not seem very clear from the wording. Hazlitt describes poetry in one place as "strictly the language of the imagination, that faculty which represents objects not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded, by other thoughts and feelings, into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power." Elsewhere he calls it "the high-wrought enthusiasm of fancy and feeling"—phrases which describe admirably the spirit of poetry but ignore its form. Leigh Hunt, in his delightful essay on imagination and fancy, defined poetry as "the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty, and power, embodying and illustrating its conceptions by imagination and fancy, and modulating its language on the principle of variety in unity." Here we have both spirit and form, the last phrase seeming clearly to imply metre, for the giving of æsthetic pleasure by

"the perception of similitude in dissimilitude" was the chief merit Wordsworth claimed for metre.

Passing to a somewhat later school of criticism, we may take Carlyle and Matthew Arnold as typical of two wholly different approaches to the subject. Thinking rather of the content, *le fond*, of poetry, Arnold described it as "a criticism of life." For this he has been taken to task,<sup>1</sup> not wholly without reason. But for Arnold criticism was a word of high import: moreover, his definition was qualified by words not often quoted along with it, viz., "under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." But, as R. H. Hutton rightly complains, criticism is, at best, a sadly limiting word, and the qualification leaves much unexplained, notably the word poetic itself. Carlyle, on the other hand, asking himself what is "the difference between true Poetry and true Speech not poetical," answers, "for my own part, I find considerable meaning in the old vulgar distinction of Poetry being *metrical*, having music in it, being a Song. Truly, if pressed to give a definition, one might say this as soon as anything else: If your delineation be authentically *musical*, musical not in word only, but in heart and substance, in all the thoughts and utterances of it, in the whole conception of it, then it will be poetical; if not, not. . . . Poetry, therefore, we will call *musical thought*." In other words, music of language answering to music of mind and expressed in the spirit of music. This "definition" contains a deep truth,

<sup>1</sup> "Never was there a more fatal error," says Mr E. G. Lamborn, "than Arnold's criticism of life theory; even when he said that Shelley's letters would last longer than his lyrics he was not more completely mistaken" (*The Rudiments of Criticism*, 1917, p. 121).



but *as* a definition, even as a working description, it is deficient owing to the fact that "the music of mind," "musical in heart and substance," are terms which, however true, are not very clear—need, in fact, further explanation and definition.

One is tempted to linger over definitions such as that of Edgar Allan Poe: "Poetry is the rhythmic creation of beauty,"<sup>1</sup> or that of Keble, who called it "a vent for overcharged feeling or a full imagination." But let us come to writers of our own day. Innumerable are the definitions offered by various recent writers. Let us select a few that seem typical. "Poetry," said Mr Courthope in his Taylor Institution lectures, "is the art which produces pleasure for the imagination by imitating human actions, thoughts, and passions in metrical language." This description would seem almost adequate, but on what grounds is the pleasure confined to the imagination? And why the limitation implied in "imitating"?<sup>2</sup>—an echo, we may remark, of Aristotle. Is not the highest poetry creative rather than merely imitative? "A poet," says Dryden, "is a maker, as the name signifies, and he who cannot make, that is, invent, has his name for nothing." Theodore Watts-Dunton in his well-known essay in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (an essay since published in separate book form) thus defines poetry: "Absolute poetry is the concrete and artistic expression of the human mind in emotional and rhythmical language,"

<sup>1</sup> In an essay, "On the Poetic Principle," prefixed to his poems.

<sup>2</sup> It is but just to give Mr Courthope's own answer to this question. "I call it," he says in the same lecture, "an imitative art, because its function is to find beautiful forms for the expression of ideas existing universally, but embryonically, in the human imagination."



in defence of which he pleads that "no literary expression can properly speaking be called poetry that is not in a certain deep sense emotional, whatever may be its subject-matter, concrete in its method and its diction,<sup>1</sup> rhythmical in movement, and artistic in form." In much of this definition one feels inclined to acquiesce, but misgivings come with the thought of Shelley's magnificent abstractions—say in *Adonais*, than which, however, several of his poems are still more abstract. And is not "artistic in form," if it means anything more than simply metrical, somewhat vague? Nor does the essay make it less so, I think, though it contends admirably for the high import of that element of poetry which we have called form. Coming to one of the most recent expositions of poetic theory, that of Sir Henry Newbolt in his important book, *A New Study of English Poetry*,<sup>2</sup> I must confess to finding in it little or no help toward a clearer understanding of the nature of poetry. In the first place, when, in his first chapter, he asks the question "What is Poetry?" this question means for him, as he tells us later (p. 22), "What is the distinction between the poetic and the prosaic?" That is not the question I am endeavouring to answer here. And I cannot see that the answer at which the author arrives carries us very far toward a solution of our difficulty. The poetic, he says, "is the expression of the æsthetic or intuitive activity, the other [the prosaic]

<sup>1</sup> "With abstractions," he explains, "the poet has nothing to do save to take them and turn them into concretions." Certainly concreteness is a general characteristic of poetic diction, but I cannot hold that poetry has nothing to do with abstractions.

<sup>2</sup> Constable, 1917. It is based on lectures delivered by the author in his capacity of Professor of Poetry at the Royal Society of Literature.

the expression of the intellectual or logical activity of the human spirit. An intuition or set of intuitions, once grasped and expressed in words, will be a poem—even though the words take the form of what is commonly called prose.” From which it follows, as he admits, that a novel is essentially poetry.<sup>1</sup>

A much more helpful definition, so it seems to me, is that arrived at by the Rev. Professor George O'Neill, S.J., in the course of a series of articles in the *Irish Monthly*, since published in book form. It is this: “Poetry is the language of passion and imagination expressing themselves under control of the laws of beauty.” To attain a definition of poetry which may stand self-explained is not, I think, possible: and this one requires the explanation which its author provides. Thus the imagination is for him “the group of faculties which idealizes.” “Under control of the laws of beauty” implies metre, because the language of passion and imagination controlled by the laws of beauty which control all the arts is of its nature metrical.<sup>2</sup> I have already referred to the admirable manner in which the *raison d'être* of the bond which exists between poetry and metre is here set forth.<sup>3</sup>

It remains for me to offer, without entirely rejecting the definitions I have mentioned, a description of poetry which seems to me to sum up what has been said in this chapter about its nature. It aims at nothing more than

<sup>1</sup> Page 23.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Hutton, among others, had reached the same conclusion: “Verse is the natural and only possible instrument of expression both for overpowering lyrical feeling and for complete imaginative insight.” (*Brief Literary Criticisms*, p. 218.)

<sup>3</sup> I have placed in an appendix some further definitions which seem to me noteworthy and helpful.

to be intelligible and, so to say, popular. Poetry is *the art which expresses in metrical and otherwise fitting or congruous language, self, life, nature, God, and all their interactions realized or apprehended in a mood of emotional and imaginative exaltation*. This definition does not pretend to stand alone: it must be understood in the light of what has gone before. Metre as an essential of poetry has been discussed under the heading of poetic form, congruous language under the heading of diction. The latter term is intended to cover all those qualities of diction which most fittingly and happily express the poetic spirit as distinct from the spirit of science or of matter-of-fact. The last clause of the definition attempts to express the mood which gives to the poet the power to transfuse into a piece of writing what I have called the poetic spirit.

Let me endeavour to explain what, in this connexion, I understand by 'realizing.' Habit, familiarity, indifference, heedlessness, absorption in practical and utilitarian aims cause us to accept on the mere surface of the mind most of the notions that come our way. But from time to time an idea, a feeling, even a purely outward object that strikes our senses, breaks through this surface and passes inward. It 'comes home' to us, as we say; we 'take it to heart.' It stirs emotion. The imagination becomes awake, as it were, to its intense and living reality. All our being feels it. That is realization, and it is the mood of poetry.<sup>1</sup> Lastly,

<sup>1</sup> This is an experience through which all of us have passed many a time. To those who would care to see for themselves how great are its bearings on religion and philosophy no less than on literature, I would suggest that part of Newman's *Grammar of Assent* in which he deals with real and notional assents. From the point of view of poetry Principal Shairp has studied realization in his *The Poetic*



'exaltation' is, I am aware, not an altogether definite and rigid term. It is here intended to signify those moods in which a man is raised 'above himself,' as we say, that is, above his everyday, commonplace self, into "his highest self, his best self."

There lies against this description an obvious objection—an objection, however, which must be met by many of the others. It is that an ineffectual sentence of banishment from the realm of poetry is thereby passed upon a very large mass of verse, excellent verse some of it, which has hitherto claimed right of citizenship there. The charge is true, but the consequences of its truth are not such as the objector might suppose. For the would-be poet, though excluded from the realm of poetry, is not cast forth into exterior darkness. Bordering upon the realm of poetry lies another realm, the realm (or shall we call it the principality?) of *verse*.<sup>1</sup> The citizens of that country are, it is true, of varied types and some of not wholly reputable character. Within its borders flourish the rhymster, the poetaster, the maker of doggerels and nonsense rhymes, the comic poet, the writers of *vers de société* and of political squibs and lampoons, the composer of versified treatises,<sup>2</sup> the versifier skilful and conscientious perhaps, but uninspired, *et hoc genus omne*.<sup>3</sup> But this principality of verse has every right

*Interpretation of Nature*, and the subject is still further developed in *The Enjoyment of Poetry*, by Max Eastman. See in this last-mentioned work the chapters on "Realization of Action," "Realization of Things," "Realization of Emotion," "Realization of Ideas."

<sup>1</sup> The frontiers between the two territories are not always easy to determine: there is a debatable land upon the border, and boundary disputes are inevitable.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, the ingenious person who composed a treatise on chemistry in 286 Byronic stanzas.

<sup>3</sup> All this question of verse which falls below the level of poetry in



to maintain its independent existence and even to hold up its head as a legitimate smaller nation in the world of literature. To classify a given metrical composition as verse rather than as poetry is not therefore to condemn it utterly. Our definition, for instance, would assign to the region of verse the greater part of the work of the school of Pope—the *Essay on Criticism*, for instance. Yet the present writer, at all events, has for the point and brilliancy of that famous essay a high admiration. With that I leave my attempted definition to the judgment of the reader.

#### NOTE ON METRE AND RHYTHM, PROSE AND VERSE

“Rhythm,” said the Poet Laureate not long ago,<sup>1</sup> “is a difficult subject.” And if any proof of his statement were needed, it has been supplied by the controversies on the subject that of late have been raging between experts and by the variety of views set forth in recent books. There can be no question of attempting here to solve these problems. I wish merely to point out what seems a convenient way (it is not my own invention) of distinguishing metre and rhythm, prose and verse.

Rhythm is common to verse and to well-written prose<sup>2</sup>:

the true sense of the word will be found admirably discussed in Father O'Neill's *Essays on Poetry*. It was also discussed in an amusing as well as suggestive way in the essay by Father J. Keating, S.J., in *The Month*, already referred to. For Father Keating verse is “fact expressed in rhythmical language, untouched by real imagination,” and that no matter how polished, refined, witty, or wise the verse may be.

<sup>1</sup> In an address delivered in November 1917 and since published under the title of *The Necessity of Poetry* (Oxford, 1918).

<sup>2</sup> Professor Saintsbury has written a *History of English Prose Rhythm* which is the standard work on the subject.

metre is, or ought to be, confined to verse. Therefore it would seem that metre and rhythm ought at least to be regarded as distinct. The distinction may be presented in this way. Metre is a fixed *pattern* formed by little groups of stressed (or accented) and unstressed syllables, which groups recur and repeat themselves like a pattern on wall-paper or figured cloth. Thus we may have, for instance,

or

u   ,   u   ,   u   ,   u   ,   u   ,  
 ,   u   u   ,   u   u   ,   u   u   ,

A poet might, of course, write his entire poem according to the pattern chosen. But that would be monotonous. Instead, he takes the pattern merely as the basis of his verse.<sup>1</sup> It serves him, so to speak, as a geometrical background which he will partially overlay with flowers, yet always so that the background is not wholly lost to sight. He will vary the position of his stresses and of his pauses (*cæsura*, etc.) and the number of his unstressed syllables.<sup>2</sup> These variations, when once the pattern has taken firm hold of the hearer's consciousness, may be pushed very far.<sup>3</sup> How far they may be pushed without that consciousness of the pattern disappearing cannot, I think, be determined beforehand with precision, any more than we can determine precisely how far apart two riming words may be without ceasing to be perceived as rimes, or how unlike two sounds may be without ceasing to be felt as assonances. But there *are* limits. If variations be pushed beyond a certain point the consciousness of the pattern is lost, that is, the sense of uniformity behind variety and the sense of regular recurrence disappears. For the hearer metre has ceased to be.

<sup>1</sup> There are cases in which it is by no means easy to decide what is the pattern that the poet has chosen. But the decision may be left to the prosodists. The reader or listener is pleasantly aware that there is a pattern or design, and he is satisfied.

<sup>2</sup> He may even change his pattern, not without danger, however, to the sense of regular recurrence, a danger proportioned to the frequency of the change.

<sup>3</sup> Tennyson's blank verse has a marvellous variety of rhythm through long tracts of the same metre.

Now in introducing such variations the poet, as I think it is both convenient and correct to say, varies, not the metre—he may be using the same metre all the time—but the rhythm. The rhythm, then, would be the movement of rise and fall, stress and non-stress, in an actual piece of verse as it exists concretely, whereas the metre is the scheme or pattern or framework (partly theoretic, partly realized) which serves as the basis of the verse. Thus we see how it is that two writers may use the same metre yet differ greatly in rhythm. The rhythm of Pope's heroic couplets differs from the rhythm of Dryden's. Byron used the Spenserian stanza in *Childe Harold*, but with new effects. The blank verse of Shakespeare's later plays differs greatly from that of his earlier. And so on.

It may help our imagination if we think of rhythm as we think of waves and ripples, the waves being the stressed syllables, the ripples the unstressed. Suppose that, ordinarily speaking, so many ripples followed each wave or that similar groups of waves and ripples kept recurring at intervals. This regular succession might represent a metrical scheme.

Let us pass to the distinction between prose and verse. Most people would consider the distinction obvious, as no doubt it is for the most part. But it must be borne in mind that they are usually helped in that distinction by the printed page.<sup>1</sup> Suppose that help withdrawn from them. I find the following paragraph in an article by Father J. Keating, S.J., in *The Month*,<sup>2</sup> on Poetry and Verse:

"Now in urging this distinction let me not be thought oblivious of the fact that, as logicians would at once detect, it is not what they in their simple fashion label 'a complete disjuncture.' Poetry, in other words, is verse, no doubt, whereas this latter cannot always be described as poetry. Verse is the genus, poetry its noblest species. Here it might be well to mention that it only makes confusion to describe as poetry what is not framed in rhythmic measure, though poetic

<sup>1</sup> And what the printing does for the eye the rime may do for the ear. End-rimes in particular mark the place where the rhythm stops, to begin again in the following line.

<sup>2</sup> May 1916.

in its substance. Prose is one thing, verse another; poetry excludes the former ultimately by its method and the latter just as clearly by its character and essence."

That paragraph is in regular verse, the verse of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*. And if any reader has been caught unawares by its apparent prose form, it is easy to see that when the verse is irregular—varying, for instance, in line length—its distinction from prose is often far from obvious. Let us consider briefly, then, what are the elements of that distinction.

Prose, we notice, is built up of certain units—words, clauses or phrases, sentences, paragraphs. All these units are concerned with the sense or meaning, and, as a piece of verse has, it is to be hoped, sense and meaning, it will have these same units, with the possible exception of the last. But verse has, besides these, other units not belonging to prose. It is built up of syllable-groups (or 'feet'), word-groups (or lines),<sup>1</sup> and often line-groups (or stanzas). These are concerned primarily not with the sense but with the sound. As verse is akin to music, the comparison of musical notation, though halting, may be helpful. Thus in music the staves (representing for us the lines) are divided into bars (the feet), each containing so many beats (the syllables). But as the tune (to use an unmusical term), that is, the actual notes of the piece, does not fit with absolute regularity into this scheme (the same number and time-value of notes to each bar), so the rhythm of verse need not conform with absolute regularity to the metre. Now in prose not only must the rhythm not conform with regularity to a pattern: there must be no pattern. The first law of prose is that it must not be metrical. Rhythmical it may be, but the rhythm in good prose is undeveloped, fragmentary. Before it develops into the impression of a regularly recurring pattern the regularity breaks down. Verse demands an uninterrupted flow of rhythm with the sense of a fixed pattern, at least in the background. Prose never allows the impression of rhythm to be more than momentary.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The importance of the line as a unit of verse has been, it would seem, comparatively neglected. See Max Eastman, *The Enjoyment of Poetry*, ch. xiv.

<sup>2</sup> See Cary F. Jacob, *The Foundations and Nature of Verse*, 1918.



The distinction I have thus attempted to draw between verse (not *poetry*, of course) and prose is based on their difference in respect of rhythm. In the case of writers who abandon metre as the basis of their verse this distinction is admittedly difficult to draw. "Where," says a writer on contemporary poetry, "can we find the boundary line between verse and prose? Perhaps we cannot find it. As the lines grow longer and vary more in the matter of the recurrence of stresses, the rhythms become more like prose, less like song. But it would be very difficult indeed to tell just when lines become too long and level to belong to verse. And other matters must be considered with the matter of rhythm in determining whether any bit of literature is poetry or prose. We must take into account the conciseness of the expression, the emotional or intellectual quality, the imagery and symbolism, the power of the imagination in the presentation of the theme."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the distinction of literary form breaking down, considerations of style and even of substance are called in. Indeed, it would not be unfair to say that in

ch. ix. Compare the following description by the Poet Laureate: "The difference between the rhythms of prose and verse is this, that poetry selects certain rhythms and makes systems of them, and these repeat themselves: and this is metre. Whereas the rule for rhythm in well-constructed prose is to avoid appearance of artifice; so that the rhythms must not appear to repeat themselves. . . . This conclusion may be most simply stated by saying that metrical verse is forbidden in prose." (*The Necessity of Poetry*, 1918.) Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, in *The Art of Writing*, 1919, p. 54, describes the difference thus: "Verse is memorable speech set down in metre with strict rhythms; prose is memorable speech set down without constraint of metre and in rhythms both lax and various."

<sup>1</sup> Marguerite Wilkinson, *New Voices: An Introduction to Contemporary Poetry* (N.Y.: The Macmillan Co., 1920).

much recent poetry the distinction has become purely typographical, a matter of print. Miss Amy Lowell's 'polyphonic prose' is really a mixture of prose and verse, printed as prose. Other writers print their poetic prose in lines of varying length.

## PART II

### WHAT CAN POETRY DO FOR US?

I HAVE some fear, in beginning this part of my work, that the reader may take all I shall say as a one-sided eulogy, a mere piece of special pleading. And it is not to be denied that in dwelling on the excellences of any object one is prone to overpraise by dint of mere concentration on one's theme. We must then bear in mind that, besides poetry, there are other arts and there are several other excellent branches of literature, that beyond and above art and literature there are the far greater things, God and nature and life. It remains that literature and art are mirrors of these greater things, and perhaps the most flawless mirror of them all is poetry. I must then keep poetry in its right place, show it in its true setting, aware of the warning adage that he who proves too much proves naught. Yet I have the less fear in speaking much good of poetry forasmuch as its lovers are fewer than of right they ought to be, above all in this land of ours, and because I feel that anyone who may hereby be led to the love of it will yet have reason to be glad.

Let us consider one by one a few of the things that we may hopefully look to gain from poetry.

#### DELIGHT

And first poetry does for us just what all the fine arts do, it ministers to our delight. Like every thing

of beauty, it is a joy for ever. Its mission is to make glad the heart of man. Ask of its lovers why they read poetry. You may expect an answer such as might be looked for from children questioned as to why they eat sweet things. Yet though the answers might be in form the same or nearly so, they are in substance different, for the pleasures respectively received are not of the same order. Pleasure received from taste has no echo elsewhere in our being. The pleasure that comes from poetry is not merely, as we shall see, a pleasant tingling of the ears, for sound is not its sole beauty, and even sound can reach beyond the ears. In all poetry that is true poetry, emotion, imagination, mind, all share in the pleasure, for all are appealed to by the beautiful.

I am not going to analyse in a dry, scientific manner the nature of the delight we take in poetry. Yet we may ask ourselves, "What in a general way can there be in poetry which could be the source of this delight?" Let me essay an answer. There is first, then, the *music* of verse, that "linkéd sweetness long drawn out." Music and poetry, we have said, are akin: song is their marriage.

Sphere-born harmonious Sisters, Voice and Verse,  
Wed your divine sounds.<sup>1</sup>

We have seen by what devices the poets have wrought speech into music. We have considered metre and rime, assonance and alliteration as elements of poetic form. Let us look at them now from a fresh viewpoint—as sources of the delight of poetry.

Consider, for instance, the pleasure that arises from the endless variety of the poet's rhythms and metres. It is like the charm of the varied measures in music.

<sup>1</sup> Milton, *At a Solemn Musick*.



There are the solemn cadences of Handel's *Largo* or Chopin's *Funeral March*, the tramp and blare of martial music, the playful lightness of a *scherzo* or caprice. And the same sonata of Beethoven will break from *adagio* into *allegro* and back again.<sup>1</sup> So the poet varies his measures to suit the mood or the theme. He makes his syllables, like the musician's notes, move sadly or gaily at will, from the stately movement of the grander passages in Shakespeare to the half-playful love poems of the Elizabethan song-writers, "frisking light in frolic measures," from the quiet and sober undertone of Wordsworth to the swing and often the jingle of Kipling. Compare the grave and solemn march of *Paradise Lost* with the gallop of Browning's *Good News from Ghent* or the capricious and fanciful metres of his *Pied Piper of Hamelin*. Next there is the delight of deftly interwoven rimes and length of line as seen in the numberless varieties of *stanza form*. Varieties of metre and of stanza form I shall here exemplify together.

Take this stanza, chosen almost at random from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Note how the ear rests with fuller satisfaction on the 'long resounding line' at the close :

Nought under heaven so strongly doth allure  
 The sense of man, and all his mind possess,  
 As Beauty's lovely bait, that doth procure  
 Great warriors oft their rigour to repress,  
 And mighty hands forget their manliness ;  
 Drawn with the power of a heart-robbing eye,  
 And wrapt in fetters of a golden tress,  
 That can with melting pleasaunce mollify  
 Their hardened hearts, enured to blood and cruelty.

<sup>1</sup> These will not be technicalities to one who has a certain acquaintance with music. Others, it is hoped, will pardon them because of the aptness of the illustration.

In a very different poem, Byron's *Childe Harold*, this stanza form is used, but modified to suit the spirit.

From Matthew Arnold's *Thyrsis* :

Yes, thou art gone, and round me too the Night  
 In ever-nearing circle weaves her shade.  
 I see her veil draw soft across the day,  
 I feel her slowly chilling breath invade  
 The cheek grown thin, the brown hair sprent with grey ;  
 I feel her finger light  
 Laid pausefully upon life's headlong train ;  
 The foot less prompt to meet the morning dew,  
 The heart less bounding at emotion new,  
 And hope, once crushed, less quick to spring again.

Note how long the ear is kept waiting for the rime that comes at last in the fifth line.

From Browning's *Rabbi Ben Ezra* :

Fool ! All that is, at all,  
 Lasts ever, past recall ;  
 Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure :  
 What entered into thee,  
 That was, is, and shall be :  
 Time's wheel runs back or stops : Potter and clay endure.

It has been noted how admirably this stanza form seems to suit the poet's thought. Then take the stanza form of the *Rubáiyât*, the antithesis in spirit of Browning's poem :

Ah, fill the Cup :—what boots it to repeat  
 How Time is slipping underneath our Feet :  
 Unborn TO-MORROW and dead YESTERDAY,  
 Why fret about them if TO-DAY be sweet !

The following is now commonly known as the Burns stanza, as it was an especial favourite with that poet :

Wee, modest, crimson-tippèd flow'r,  
 Thou's met me in an evil hour ;

For I maun crush amang the stoure  
 Thy slender stem :  
 To spare thee now is past my pow'r,  
 Thou bonnie gem.

From Tennyson's *In Memoriam* :

O days and hours, your work is this  
 To hold me from my proper place,  
 A little while from his embrace,  
 For fuller gain of after bliss :

That out of distance might ensue  
 Desire of nearness doubly sweet ;  
 And unto meeting when we meet,  
 Delight a hundredfold accrue.

From Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott* :

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,  
 Little breezes dusk and shiver  
 Thro' the wave that runs for ever  
 By the island in the river  
     Flowing down to Camelot.  
 Four gray walls, and four gray towers,  
 Overlook a space of flowers,  
 And the silent isle imbowers  
     The Lady of Shalott.

Then there is the sonnet form in which so much of the best English poetry is written. I seize the occasion to give this exquisite sonnet of Wordsworth's :

Mother ! whose maiden bosom was uncrost  
 With the least shade of thought to sin allied ;  
 Woman ! above all women glorified,  
 Our tainted nature's solitary boast ;  
 Purer than foam on central ocean tost ;  
 Brighter than eastern skies at daybreak strewn  
 With fancied roses, than the unblemished moon  
 Before her wane begins on heaven's blue coast ;

Thy Image falls to earth. Yet some, I ween,  
 Not unforgiven the suppliant knee might bend,  
 As to a visible Power, in which did blend  
 All that was mixed and reconciled in Thee  
 Of mother's love with virgin purity,  
 Of high with low, celestial with terrene !

Let me add some examples of less familiar stanza forms. And first let us take some examples from George Herbert, who was an expert in stanza forms :

Thou whose sweet youth and early hopes enhance  
 Thy rate and price, and mark thee for a treasure,  
 Harken unto a Verser, who may chance  
 Rhyme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure :  
 A verse may find him who a sermon flies,  
 And turn delight into a sacrifice.

From *The Church Porch*

Here is a lighter measure :

Wherefore with my utmost art  
 I will sing Thee,  
 And the cream of all my heart  
 I will bring Thee.

The following is from a touching poem on the passion of Christ entitled *The Sacrifice* :

Therefore my soul melts and my heart's dear treasure  
 Drops blood, the only beads my words to measure.  
 Oh, let this cup pass, if it be Thy pleasure :  
 Was ever grief like mine !

This last line is repeated as a refrain at the end of every stanza.

· Lastly, let me quote the well-known lines from *Virtue* :

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,  
 The bridal of the earth and sky,  
 The dew shall weep thy fall to-night,  
 For thou must die.



The following are from Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who loved elaborate and intricate forms :

Yea to Love himself is pour'd  
 This frail song of hope and fear.  
 Thou art Love, of one accord  
 With kind Sleep to bring her near,  
 Still-eyed, deep-eyed, ah how dear !  
 Master, Lord,  
 In her name implor'd, O hear.

From *Love's Nocturn*

Notice the *internal* rime in the last line :

What thing unto mine ear  
 Wouldst thou convey—what secret thing,  
 O wandering water ever whispering ?  
 Surely thy speech shall be of her.  
 Thou water, O thou whispering wanderer,  
 What message dost thou bring ?

*The Stream's Secret*

The following is a stanza much used by Aubrey de Vere :

Great power of Love, that, wide as heaven, doth brood  
 O'er all the earth and doest all things well,  
 Light of the wise and safeguard of the good,  
 Nowhere, methinks, thou better lovest to dwell  
 Than in the hearts of innocents that still,  
 By dangerous love untempted, work Love's will.

His long poem (160 stanzas), *The Children of Lir*, is in this metre. So also is *Naisi's Wooing* and *St Francis and Perfect Joy*. As a last example I may quote :

Joy of sad hearts and light of downcast eyes !  
 Dearest, thou art enshrined  
 In all thy fragrance in our memories ;  
 For we must ever find  
 Bare thought of thee  
 Freshen this weary life while weary life shall be.

CARDINAL NEWMAN

These few specimens can give but an imperfect idea of the wonderful variety of metres and stanza forms that the poets have used. Many readers will like to study further. Accordingly I shall give some further indications, using technical names merely for facility of reference.

Tercets (riming aaa, bbb, etc.) : Tennyson's *Two Voices*.

Terza rima (aba, bcb, cdc, etc., as in Dante's *Divina Commedia*) : Byron's *Prophecy of Dante*.

Quatrain : Arnold's *Song of Callicles*, Herrick's *To the Virgins*, Tennyson's *The Daisy*, all with different rime schemes.

Heroic quatrain : Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

Five-line stanza : Swinburne's *Tenebræ*, George Herbert's *The Glimpse*.

Rime Royal : Chaucer's *Troilus*, Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*, J. Thomson's *To our Ladies of Death*.

Ottava rima : Byron's *Don Juan*.

Shelley's *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* is in a twelve-line stanza.

Many foreign metres and stanza forms have been tried in English. Some Italian forms, including the sonnet, have been already mentioned. Tennyson and Robert Bridges, among others, have experimented with classical measures. Old French verse forms have been tried with delightful effects—the ballade, rondeau, roundel, villanelle, chant royal, pantoum, triolet, and so on. Austin Dobson was one of the most successful experimenters.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Andrews, *The Writing and Reading of Verse*, ch. xv., "French Forms." There is an anthology of poems in these measures, *Ballads and Rondeaux, Chants Royaux, Destinées, and Villanelles*, selected by Gleeson White (W. Scott).

Rime and stanza form are not the poet's only means of delighting the ear. There is *refrain*, so used in song. It is a favourite device of Irish poets. We are all familiar with the effect of such refrains as *My Dark Rosaleen*, *Mo Craoibhin* (Creeveen) *Cno Soggarth Aroon*, *O dear dark head*, *The Fair Hills of Eire O*. Mark the effect of the recurrence in Francis Thompson's *The Hound of Heaven* of the lines beginning, "But with unhurrying chase and unperturbèd pace," or of "Singing" in Sir Lewis Morris's poem, *At Midnight*, or of "O Sorrow!" in Keats's *Song of Sorrow*. The device often recurs in the poems of Mangan, Ferguson, and Allingham. Then there is assonance, which, as we have seen, was so large an element in Gaelic poetry, and alliteration, which was the chief device in Anglo-Saxon poetry. And all the subtle combinations of vowel sounds, the elimination of all harshness and roughness in consonants whereby everyday speech is wrought into music, fashioned into a thing of beauty. Did space allow, it would be pleasure to give examples of every one of these devices, or rather *procédés* of art. I can but give a very few instances of verbal melody in which they will be exemplified without being unusually obtrusive. Take first the opening verses of Milton's *Lycidas* :

Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more  
 Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,  
 I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,  
 And with forced fingers rude  
 Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.  
 Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear  
 Compels me to disturb your season due :  
 For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,  
 Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.

Who would not sing for Lycidas ? He knew  
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.  
He must not float upon his watery bier  
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind  
Without the meed of some melodious tear.<sup>1</sup>

Tennyson is one of the greatest masters of the music of verse. The melody of his song is occasionally almost too sensuous to be completely beautiful.

Here is a song from *Merlin and Vivien* :

In Love, if Love be Love, if Love be ours,  
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers :  
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.

It is the little rift within the lute,  
That by and by will make the music mute,  
And ever widening slowly silence all.

The little rift within the lover's lute,  
Or little pitted speck in garner'd fruit,  
That rotting inward slowly moulders all.

It is not worth the keeping ; let it go ;  
But shall it ? answer, darling, answer, no.  
And trust me not at all or all in all.

Here is a fragment from the rich melody of the choric song in *The Lotos-Eaters* :

Why are we weigh'd upon with heaviness,  
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,  
While all things else have rest from weariness ?  
All things have rest : why should we toil alone,  
We only toil, who are the first of things,  
And make perpetual moan,  
Still from one sorrow to another thrown :  
Nor ever fold our wings,  
And cease from wanderings,  
Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm ;  
Nor hearken what the inner spirit sings,

<sup>1</sup> Note the alliterations of *m* and *w* in the last three lines.



‘ There is no joy but calm ! ’

Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things ? <sup>1</sup>

*Maud* is full of verbal music varied to harmonize with every change of passion. For instance, the passage that begins :

Come into the garden, Maud,  
For the black bat, night, has flown,  
Come into the garden, Maud,  
I am here at the gate alone ;  
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,  
And the musk of the rose is blown.<sup>2</sup>

All his ‘ songs ’ are full of rich music, especially those that occur here and there in *The Princess* : “ Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,” “ As through the land at eve we went,” “ Sweet and low,” and the rest. And then there is the full-voiced music of *Ænone*.

I have space for but a very few examples more, and I shall take them from Anglo-Irish poetry. They can in no sense be representative. They merely illustrate some verbal melodies of a different character from those already given. The first is from Moore :

At the mid hour of night, when stars are weeping, I fly  
To the lone vale we loved, when life shone warm in thine eye ;  
And I think oft, if spirits can steal from the regions of air,  
To revisit past scenes of delight thou wilt come to me there,  
And tell me our love is remember’d, even in the sky.

Then I sing the wild song ’twas once such rapture to hear,  
When our voices, commingling, breathed like one on the ear ;  
And, as Echo far off through the vale my sad orison rolls,  
I think, O my love, ’tis thy voice from the Kingdom of Souls  
Faintly answering still the notes that once were so dear.

<sup>1</sup> Note, for instance, the iteration so characteristic of the chafing, discontented spirit.

<sup>2</sup> This, as might be expected, has been set to music.

The next are from Ethna Carbery's *The Four Winds of Eirinn* :

She is Mary of the Curls—the swan-white modest maid,  
 Grey pools of quiet are her eyes, like waters in the shade,  
 She moves as softly through the world as any whispered prayer,  
 And where she steps, the blossoms rise, and song haunts the air.

*I would play you the music of laughter !*  
 And set the smiles lighting your apple-bloom face,  
 In little glad ripples, that gather apace  
 As if the lone hush of lake-waters were stirred  
 In a wind from the swift-sweeping wing of a bird,  
 Which trails the breeze after.

And this from *Art the Lonely*, another poem in the same little book :

The berried quicken-branches lament in lonely sighs,  
 Through open doorways of the *dún* a lonely wet wind cries,  
 And lonely in the hall he sits with feasting warriors round,  
 The harp that lauds his fame in fights hath a lonely sound.

Lastly, let me quote these verses from another Anglo-Irish poetess, Dora Sigerson Shorter :

When I stood lone on the height my sorrow did speak,  
 As I went down the hill I cried and I cried,  
 The soft little hands of the rain stroking my cheek,  
 The kind little feet of the rain ran by my side.

When I went to thy grave, broken with tears,  
 When I crouched down in the grass dumb with despair,  
 I heard the sweet croon of the wind soft in my ears,  
 I felt the kind lips of the wind touching my hair.

There is here and there in Anglo-Irish verse a distinctive quality caught directly or indirectly from the Gaelic. Thomas MacDonagh has named it 'the Irish Mode.'<sup>1</sup> I refer the readers to his book on Anglo-

<sup>1</sup> *Literature in Ireland* (The Talbot Press), 1916.

Irish literature, where he explains the term, and to the examples of 'poems of the Irish mode,' of which he gives some fifty pages. The few verses which I have been able to give here are, as I have said, in no sense representative of the mass of Anglo-Irish poetry.

I have dwelt so far merely on the sensuous beauty of sweet sound in language. Sound is not its only source of sensuous beauty, for if poetry has melodies for the ear it has also pictures for the eye. It cannot, like painting, place actual colour and form before us : the poet has to paint with words instead of pigments. Yet he contrives to call up in the imagination pictures, not alone of places that the eye of man has seen, but of landscapes that no eye shall ever look upon. He opens magic casements and the mind's eyes look into a world of enchantment. What eye of flesh ever looked upon the world of Keats's *Endymion* or even upon Tennyson's Isle of the Lotos ?

Through the senses poetry reaches to that part of us which is more than animal and yet not wholly spiritual, our emotional nature. It stirs the emotions like music, but more than music, for there is more than music in it. Prose instinct with true feeling, and above all the spoken word, can move pity and sorrow and exultation ; nay, the appeal of written prose and spoken word to the deeper emotions is often stronger than that of poetry, unless it be the poetry of great drama. But over the milder emotions—comfort, peace, joy, sadness—beautiful form with genuine feeling behind it has a wonderful control, if one but yield oneself to its influence. For there is a quality in poetry which cannot be caught in the mesh of words ; it is an unaccountable glamour, a mysterious suggestiveness—if I may use the ugly



expression—"beneath and beyond the word," a something not put there consciously by the poet whereby more is conveyed than is actually put in words, because, no doubt, "more is meant than meets the eye." To be alive to that, to be thrilled by it, is the purest delight of poetry.

"But what use is all that," breaks in your practical man, "this tickling of the ears and flattery of the eyes, and these mysterious sensations that cannot be set forth in plain language? Is that all that poetry can do for us?" Well, all that may be no 'use,' but then you must likewise cast aside as useless every other pure pleasure that makes glad the heart. It is surely no small thing to add a fresh blameless pleasure to life, and if poetry did but that we well might treasure it. "All art is dedicated to joy, and there is no higher and no more serious problem than how to make men happy."<sup>1</sup> It is useful, is it not, that we should think rightly: philosophy and science teach us that. Is it not likewise useful that we should feel genuinely: poetry helps to that.<sup>2</sup> Sickly sentimentality is well-nigh as great an enemy to life as falsehood is. The highest and best poetry rightly enjoyed is an antidote to all false and harmful sentimentalism.

There are modern writers who would rule the line here and close the account. Poetry is art: poetry is music. Like all art, like music particularly, it is to be enjoyed while the intellect ceases from reasoning. But they seem to forget that there is an intellectual as well as a sensuous and emotional pleasure, and the appeal of poetry

<sup>1</sup> Schiller, quoted by Matthew Arnold, preface to *Poems*, 1853-4.

<sup>2</sup> "The soul of poetry is feeling," says Professor Laurie Magnus, *Introduction to Poetry*, p. 67, which seems an over-statement; but he is using the word in a wider sense than the ordinary.



is at its highest when it delights the whole man. Merely from the viewpoint of the æsthetic pleasure to be given, the poet's music, the poet's pictures should have behind them ideas that may delight the intellect. And in the highest poetry we find it to be so in fact. When it is not so we feel a certain void.<sup>1</sup> A moment comes when we are surfeited with the cloying sweetness of Swinburne and call out for noble ideas. We find ourselves longing for even the unmusical ruggedness of Browning, for there is strong thought behind it. And why? It is not that poems lacking high thought are less instructive or less improving: it is that they are less completely beautiful. In choosing passages to illustrate the music of poetry I have been mindful of this. I think it will be found that most of them, besides their colour and sweetness, have ideas that are worthy of the beautiful expression given to them.

Of the intellectual and spiritual pleasure derivable from poetry I shall not speak further here, as the following pages are mainly concerned with the appeal of poetry to our higher faculties.

### SOLACE

I wonder if there be any of a temperament so happy or else so unsensitive as never to pass through moments of depression, such moments as Tennyson has described :

Be near me when my light is low,  
When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick  
And tingle; and the heart is sick,  
And all the wheels of Being slow.

<sup>1</sup> " Art cannot give us complete pleasure if it only appeals to senses and leaves unsatisfied our natural curiosity and wonder—our need for understanding and our need for loving." (Bliss Carman, *The Poetry of Life*.)

I do not speak of the days that follow a great and crushing sorrow—for such days the true solace is the thought of God—but rather of low moments, moods that seem causeless or caused by things too trifling to explain them. Some ill-success, some slight, some disappointment shows to us in a flash the seamy side of life. Like a passing cloud, it spreads sudden darkness and dulness over a landscape which but a moment before was smiling. And even apart from sudden unaccountable moods of depression, certain qualities of life—its monotony or its vulgarity, its apparent aimlessness or its insincerity—come gradually to oppress us and to weigh down one's spirit. Or worry and overwork wear one into fretfulness and querulousness.

That for such hurt spirits there is an anodyne in poetry would no doubt occur to few average men, even of those who know poetry at all. We must not, then, make claims too large. But we have it from not a few histories of personal experience, and may be able to confirm it from our own, that the reading of poetry can bring upon us a sort of heart-ease, a sense of calm and peace. Poets seem conscious of this virtue in their songs. Thus Keats in his *Sleep and Poetry* :

And they shall be accounted poet kings  
Who simply tell the most heart-easing things.

Elsewhere he complains of poets of a certain stamp

forgetting the great end  
Of poesy, that it should be a friend  
To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.

And we remember Longfellow's familiar words

Such songs have power to quiet  
The restless pulse of care,

And come like the benediction  
That follows after prayer.

And the night shall be filled with music,  
And the cares that infest the day  
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs,  
And as silently steal away.

They come in a little poem in which he tells us of the comfort he himself has drawn in moments of sadness from "some simple and heartfelt lay." Lastly Newman, himself a poet as well as a great thinker in immortal prose, says of poetry that "while it recreates the imagination by the supernatural loveliness of its views, it provides a solace for the mind broken by the disappointment and sufferings of actual life."<sup>1</sup>

Whence has poetry this power? Tennyson, perhaps without entire seriousness, seems to attribute it to the soothing effect of rhythm:

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,  
A use in measured language lies;  
The sad mechanic exercise,  
Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.

And certainly one of Wordsworth's claims for metre was that it tends to soften pain and to temper passion. Keble, too, thought that all art contains a certain poetic quality inasmuch as it has "power to heal and relieve the human mind when agitated by care, passion, or ambition," that "the art naturally most fitted for this office is specially and peculiarly called poetry," and finally that "it is so fitted for this purpose because it makes use of rhythmical language."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps we keep through life something of the passionate child that can be rocked to sleep and forgetfulness of his woes. "For the most

<sup>1</sup> Essay on Poetry.

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Lectures on Poetry.*

of us," says Sir Philip Sidney, "are childish in the best things till we be cradled in the grave."

Or may it be the kinship of poetry with music?

And ever, against eating cares,  
Lap me in soft Lydian airs,  
Married to immortal verse.

But if there be restfulness and solace in the music, grave yet sweet, of Milton, "organ-voice of England," there is but little of either in the noisy banjo and accordion tunes of certain modern versifiers.

Or again, is it that the poet's mood—that mood of peace with exaltation which is the mood of the highest art—passes insensibly into our souls along with his poetry? Shelley, in that *Defence of Poetry* which is itself full of the highest poetic thought, says that "poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds."<sup>1</sup> And of the highest poetry, at least, that is surely true. To hold intercourse with such minds smoothes our ruffled spirits and soothes our petty fretfulness, calms the tossing waters of our tea-cup storms.

But I think the power of poetry to solace lies even more in this that, when we are weary of the world we see, it brings us into an ideal world, when we are disheartened by constant sight of the wrong side of the tapestry, poetry for a brief moment turns it and gives fleeting glimpses of the perfect pattern that is somehow being worked out beyond our ken.<sup>2</sup> Poetry is an escape

<sup>1</sup> And even when his poem is the record of a mood of sorrow, the poet knows how to "put his sorrows into such large speech and music as to rob them of their meaner pain."

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Arnold said some years ago in his preface to *Ward's English Poets*: "More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain



into the ideal from the pressure of this drab actuality that hems us in.

## REVELATION

It may be said, with some measure at least of truth, of every genuine poet, as Matthew Arnold said of Wordsworth, that he is

a priest to us all  
Of the wonder and bloom of the world.

According to Saint Paul it is the great office of the Christian priest to be a "dispenser of the mysteries of God." Some such function as that the poet fills.<sup>1</sup> He dispenses to us something of the mystery of the world and of life which his clearer vision has been privileged to see and his more sensitive heart to feel.

It is one of the facts of experience, explainable on general principles of human nature, that the sights of the world around us and the common incidents of life produce upon us effects that tend to grow gradually feebler. *Assueta vilescent*. Mere use and familiarity blind us to the beauty that is in common things and in average human nature. The dweller in the country is apt to care little for the wildflowers that to the dweller in cities are a wonder and a delight.

us." There is a higher and better Interpreter of life, yet poetry's interpretation may certainly "console us and sustain us."

<sup>1</sup> To Lamartine, also, seems to have occurred this analogy of the priest: "Un poète véritable selon moi est un homme qui, né avec une puissante sensibilité pour sentir, une puissante imagination pour concevoir, et une puissante raison pour régler son imagination et sa sensibilité, se séquestre complètement de toutes les occupations de la vie courante, s'enferme dans la solitude de son cœur, de la nature, et des livres, comme le prêtre dans son sanctuaire."

They that wander at will where the works of the Lord are  
revealed

Little guess what joy can be got from a cowslip out of the  
field.

Nay, our circumstances and surroundings often contribute to make us more alive to what is disagreeable in nature—foul weather and lowering skies and rain-sodden landscapes, and in the works of man—the smoke and din of cities, and in human nature itself—its insincerities, meannesses, selfishness, vulgarity. One forgets, almost, that there is another side to nature and to man.

Moreover, the daily task, the monotonous round of everyday life absorbs our time and our energies. Its intervals are filled for the most part by recreations and distractions. I am not speaking of lives whose sole occupation is amusement nor yet of the cultured and leisured few, but of the average man whose business is his master and perhaps his tyrant. Little wonder that the perceiving powers grow blunt and dulled, nay, atrophied for want of use.

The world is too much with us : late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers :  
Little we see in Nature that is ours ;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon !  
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon ;  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers ;  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune ;  
It moves us not.

Is that not even truer of to-day than of the days when Wordsworth wrote it? The barriers between us and nature—whether it be the ever-growing monstrous

cities<sup>1</sup> or the commercialized and vulgarized seaside resorts—are not, certainly, being broken down. The average man, too, has little leisure—even if education or inclination had ever given him the notion—to take refuge in reflection or to allow free play to that imaginative insight to which alone the inner beauty of nature and of life is revealed. He cannot indulge “the grave idleness which so well appreciates so much of human life.”

To all such the poet comes as a revealer, to do for us as regards the natural world what the saint and the truly spiritual man do for us as regards the supernatural.

Not that the poet, any more than the saint, is necessarily a sort of superman. On certain sides of his nature he may, like the saint, be very ordinary indeed. But he has been given certain gifts, differing, perhaps, rather in degree than in kind from those of other men. Here is Wordsworth's description of the (typical) poet: “He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind. . . . To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present. . . . Whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels. . . .”<sup>2</sup> In other words, he has in a high degree

<sup>1</sup> In the great city we are met again  
Where many souls there are that breathe and die,  
Scarce knowing more of nature's potency,  
Than what they learn from heat or cold or rain,  
The sad vicissitude of weary pain.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Compare the passage quoted from Lamartine.

imaginative insight, what we may call a gift of *vision*. He has next the power to tear, as it were, the heart out of reality, and lastly the gift of putting that heart of things into the essential words and embodying it in the music of poetry. Such descriptions are not fanciful. Men such as Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Longfellow, Francis Thompson show themselves, not alone in their poetry but in their recorded lives, to have in fact been as thus described.

Poets then are, first, seers—the one word *vates* once stood for prophet and poet alike—and then, as Browning called them, ‘makers-see.’<sup>1</sup> No doubt there are many men who are seers yet not makers-see, whose eyes are open to the wonder and beauty around them, yet who cannot put into language what they see and feel. But the poet, besides the vision, has also the gift of expression, the power to make other men sharers in some measure of the vision which delights his own soul.<sup>2</sup> All of us are in some degree capable of seeing and loving the beauty that is in all God’s handicraft, but, for the reasons I have given, our souls are too often either dulled or heedless. “All of us can see dimly, as a half-blind man sees a light, beauty in a hill or a cloud or a primrose; but the poet sees it in a radiant glow that moves him to cry aloud with delight and so to make us also look again more earnestly to share his vision. We hear, as a deaf

<sup>1</sup> The author of *The Loom of Youth* thus describes the effect made upon him by his first reading of Swinburne’s *Atalanta in Calydon*: “The world was full of strange new things, there was a new meaning in the song of the blackbird, in the rustle of the leaves, in the whispering of the warm wind. He had walked through life with blinded eyes. . . . But now a new day had broken on his life.”

<sup>2</sup> It has been said with only apparent cynicism, “The artist must love life and see that it is beautiful: without him we should doubt it.”



man is conscious of a voice, the echo of music in running water; but he hears the full clear melody and calls to us to listen more intently that we too may catch it. . . . And in many places where there is a shy and subtle beauty that most of us would never see, a poet's eye discovers it and his voice makes it plain to us." <sup>1</sup> And if it be so with external nature, it is so likewise with human life and with the mysterious heart of man. The poet's ear has caught "the still sad music of humanity," a sound far other than the confused babble or the petty hum of our outward intercourse. That music finds an echo in his own heart, sensitive as an æolian lyre to every changing breeze. And that echo reaches us through his verse, clothed in every resource of word and imagery and music. Let me allow a poet to say in his own inimitable language what I have tried to express. "Poetry," says Shelley, "reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it had been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration." <sup>2</sup>

Simple examples are at hand in the works of any of the poets. And first for their revelation of nature. There are aspects of nature in presence of which few men are wholly unmoved—the grandeur of a storm, some wide and magnificent prospect, the splendour of sunset. Even these the poet can help us to realize more vividly and enjoy more keenly, but this is not his peculiar

<sup>1</sup> E. Greening Lamborn, *The Rudiments of Criticism*.

<sup>2</sup> *Defence of Poetry*.

function. It is in showing to us the beauty that is in common things, things we have not to seek across the seas, for they are just across the threshold or in the nearest meadow, things we hold cheaply because their value is not "as of things that are brought from afar and from the remotest coasts." To our nature-blind eyes he reveals the beauty of a daisy as Burns has done or of the daffodils as Wordsworth has done. Nay, a lesser poet, Lowell, has, in a charming poem, made us see the beauty of the dandelion. Heard with the poet's ear, the cuckoo and the nightingale and the skylark are no longer common birds, but voices of enchantment. Not alone, then, are we ravished out of ourselves by the poet's vision of sunrise in the Vale of Chamounix or of the Alps from the Euganean hills. He shows us beauty in every lazy reach of some familiar river and mystery in the blue hills that bound our horizon. For the poet looks at these things with eyes that are ever fresh and from which the wonderment of childhood has never wholly faded.

And as it is with his vision of nature, so it is with his vision of human life. Few are unstirred by life's greater tragedies, few unable to respond to the representation of passion and pathos on a noble scale. Yet so piercing is Shakespeare's insight into human nature in all its moods that he is able to add a new wonder and grandeur to age-old passions, revenge and love and ambition and jealousy. But lesser poets have conferred upon us a boon perhaps even greater in revealing to us beauty and pathos in the minor incidents of life and the common men and women around us. "Surely," says Lowell, "the highest office of a poet is to show us how much variety, freshness, and opportunity abides in the obvious and familiar. He invents nothing, but seems

rather to re-discover the world about him, and his penetrating vision gives to things of daily encounter something of the strangeness of new creation."<sup>1</sup> Such a revealer was Wordsworth, and such, whatever the hypercritical may say, was Longfellow, who reached nearer to the great heart of the multitude than many a mightier singer, whose lyrics are "the very voice of the homely human emotions that cluster round the fireside." Such another was Robert Burns.

I do not, of course, wish to claim for those who express themselves in verse any exclusive possession of this gift of revelation. It is possessed in greater or less degree by every mind that is truly poetical and possesses, over and above, the gift of expression. Scarce any of the poets possess it in higher degree than certain of the great novelists. But the poet has this advantage at least over the novelist—he can concentrate all his resources upon showing us some one flower of thought, while in the novel we see the flowers in passing, with sidelong glance, as the narrative bears us onward. Moreover, the poet can fix his vision in our memories for the delight of days to come because he tells us of it

In words whose echo lasts, they were so sweet.

#### 'UPLIFT'<sup>2</sup>

Sallust, a Latin author of whom our schooldays may have left us none too pleasant memories, has a remark

<sup>1</sup> James Russell Lowell, essay on Shakespeare. Another writer has expressed this thought a little differently. "Poets," he says, "interpret us to ourselves. They make adventurous voyages into hitherto unsounded seas of the human spirit, and bring us news of their discoveries."

<sup>2</sup> This somewhat ugly American word, used here for its expressiveness, needs, perhaps, an apology.



to the effect that if a man cares at all to show himself more than the brute beasts, he ought to strive earnestly not to live, as the cattle of the field do, with eyes ever bent to earth and no thought but for their stomachs. This was indeed but a preamble to some remarks about the supremacy of intellect over the body; it might have been a plea for the ideal element in life. Such a plea we find in a poet of our own day, starting from almost the same comparison :

A starved man  
Exceeds a fat beast : we'll not barter, sir,  
The beautiful for barley. . . . It takes a high-souled man  
To move the masses . . . even to a cleaner sty.  
It takes the ideal to blow a hand's breadth off  
The dust of the actual.<sup>1</sup>

"It takes the ideal." Let us not leave the word in the vague, but come as close to the reality of things as our powers allow. When we speak of the ideal element in life, of having an ideal in life, we commonly mean, when we mean anything, holding up before ourselves some high general object of endeavour, some loftier aim that is capable of being made an inspiration for the actions of our life. Such ideals are country, glory, art, love, duty, the advancement of science, service, holiness. On the other hand, the earning of money is a very necessary and indispensable thing, no doubt, and may be motivated by an ideal, but does not in itself merit to be made an ideal. Neither does amusement, nor work, nor success, nor the achievement of social station—things not evil yet not ideal.

Now, as we know too well, in the strain and stress of

<sup>1</sup> E. B. Browning, *Aurora Leigh*.



life the light of these ideals is apt to wane and grow dim, till in the end it is wholly lost to sight. We grow absorbed in the pursuit of minor ends, immersed in business, wholly taken up by the cares that each day brings, by money matters, by family difficulties. Nay, vast multitudes of men have not a thought to spare from the mere bitter struggle to live at all. And so their eyes are turned to earth. For them the light of the ideal has gone out. Small wonder that in the end the 'man of the world' on the one hand and the harassed toiler on the other come to take a cynical view of life. They come to disbelieve in ideals, perhaps to sneer at them. Love, patriotism, philanthropy, what are these but so much breath, when they are not masks to hide the sordid aims of those who use them? The world of matter-of-fact, of animal instincts, and earthly aims seems the only genuine world. The rest they leave to dreamers. All faith in the beauty and significance of life has gone.

Now amid such a wilderness the still small voice of poetry comes crying, "Look thou not down, but up." For, even if all others should fall away, the poet cannot lose faith in life's beauty and significance. He feels even more than others "the weariness, the fever and the fret," looks aghast at

This strange disease of modern life  
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,  
Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts, grown rife.

More than others he feels the all but hopeless banality of

Our dull, uninspired, snail-paced lives.

And around the forms, incidents, and situations of

those lustreless lives he comes, spreading the tone, the atmosphere of the ideal. Of most of the greater poets and of many a humbler singer it might be said, as it was said of Tennyson,<sup>1</sup>

"His poetry is a perpetual *sursum corda*—ever lifting up our hearts to what is noble and pure and to the Eternal Source of all nobleness and purity." A French poet, Sully-Prudhomme, would make of aspiration toward the ideal the chief characteristic of poetry. Aspiration for him is "l'essor enchaîné de l'âme vers l'inaccessible et innommable félicité qui seule la comblerait."<sup>2</sup> That unattainable and nameless bliss, Poet, is what we believers call God!

More often than not—through his own fault, it may be—he has known, as Shelley and Keats and Coleridge and Mangan knew them, sorrow and shame and the sordid cares of every day. But he cannot let go the ideal or shut his eyes to it. Least of all can he be a cynic without ceasing in so far to be a poet. Even Byron, cynic<sup>3</sup> though he was, died for an ideal in the end. The poet, then, may rail at life, say hard things of men, be bitter or indignant with the world around him, but that is just because the objects of his wrath have ignored the ideal or been false to it. False to some ideal he may be himself, but he cannot be cynical about

<sup>1</sup> W. S. Lilly, *Studies in Religion and Literature*, "The Mission of Tennyson."

<sup>2</sup> "Qu'est-ce que la poésie," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Sept.-Oct. 1897, p. 599.

<sup>3</sup> "His cynicism," says John Morley, in a sympathetic essay, "was his refuge, as it sometimes is with smaller men, from the disquieting confusion which was caused by the disproportion between his visions and aspirations, and his intellectual means for satisfying himself seriously as to their true relations and substantive value" (*Miscellanies*, vol. i.).

the ideal as such. Were he to forswear that, the poet in him would die, as a poet has died in so many men.

And it is not difficult to see that this attitude of the poet toward the ideal is rendered necessary by the very nature of his art. For what art tries to express is nature and life seen in beauty. Now I do not wish to raise the often debated question as to whether art idealizes its object or simply expresses that object as it is. Enough for us to bear in mind that poetry, like the other arts, if it does not dower its subject with a beauty it did not possess, must at least choose out from nature and human life subjects that are beautiful—capable, that is, of being seen in beauty. Now, setting aside for the moment external nature, actions and thoughts of men uninspired by any ideal are not beautiful and therefore no fit subject for poetry, unless it be to serve as contrast, foil, shadow.

And it needs no very wide knowledge of the realm of poetry to convince us that this atmosphere of ideal beauty and of high ideals does indeed prevail there. The apparent exceptions ought not to shake our conviction. There is no glimpse of the ideal in a poem like Byron's *Beppo*. It is a versified novelette, versified for the reason its author gives us :

I've half a mind to tumble down to prose,  
But verse is more in fashion—so here goes.

In this, as in others of his poems, he merely pandered to the vicious taste of the *beau monde* of his day, and for the nonce ceased to be a poet. Again, for lack of any gleam of the ideal to light up its distressing images or of any noble passion at the back of its harsh railing, no charm of versification and style can redeem Swin-



burne's *Dolores* from repulsiveness or make it true poetry. And I cannot but think that the absence of ideals and the moral ugliness in much of his work have condemned that part of it to oblivion. And what of Browning? What are we to say of poetry like this:

Gr-r-r—there go, my heart's abhorrence!

Water your damned flower-pots, do!

If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,

God's blood, would not mine kill you?

Blasted lay that rose-acacia

We're so proud of! *Hy, Zy, Hine . . .*

'St, there's Vespers! *Plena gratiâ,*

*Ave, Virgo!* Gr-r-r—you swine!

and many another such passage that might be quoted? <sup>1</sup> From the viewpoint of artistic form I do not know that any defence can be made. But as to the subject the case is different. Browning's art is perhaps peculiar to himself, but few would deny it the merit of true and even great art. Its method is often this, "to make you see the perfect type by painting the opposite deviation," to bring before you the beauty of the ideal by forcing in upon you the ugliness of the actual, to draw you to virtue and goodness by picturing the hideousness of some opposite vice. In Browning's poetry there is surely no lack of noble ideals. One has but to think of *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *Abt Vogler* and *Prospice*.

Taking, then, as a whole the vast body of poetry left us by those whom the voice of the discerning as well as the general estimation has recognized as true poets,

<sup>1</sup> For example, *Caliban on Setebos*, *Garden Musings*. Some contemporary writers of real gifts, such as Mr Masefield, have outdistanced Browning in this direction, not to speak of whole schools of poetry in which the cult of ugliness is a sort of mania.



it is perhaps not too much to say with Walter Bagehot—not, certainly, an over-enthusiastic critic—that “poetry is the most surely and wisely elevating of all human things”<sup>1</sup>; or with James Russell Lowell that, “the Poet’s office is to be a voice singing amid the throng of men and lifting their common aspirations and sympathies on the wings of his song to a purer ether and a wider range of view.”<sup>2</sup> It was in all sincerity that Wordsworth wrote:

Blessings be with them—and eternal praise,  
 Who gave us nobler loves and nobler cares—  
 The Poets who on earth have made us heirs  
 Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays!  
 Oh! might my name be numbered among theirs  
 Then gladly would I end my mortal days.

Another aspect of the uplifting power of poetry has been dwelt upon by more than one writer. It is this, that poetry is an emancipation of the spirit. Many years ago, in an essay entitled “The Poet,” Emerson wrote: “The use of poetic symbols has a certain power of emancipation and exhilaration for all men. We seem to be touched by a wand, which makes us dance and run about happily, like children. We are like persons who come out of a cave or cellar into the open air. . . . Poets are thus liberating gods.” A more recent writer,<sup>3</sup> independently, it would seem, of Emerson, has more fully worked out this idea. “All poetry is an act of emancipation, even the poetry of elegy, even the ‘lyrical cry,’ even the poetry of satire and invective. There is no mere imitativeness in poetry. It is liberation of the true mind. . . . Every great poem has been a stroke

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Studies*, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning.

<sup>2</sup> *The English Poets*, Shakespeare.

<sup>3</sup> R. H. Hutton, *Brief Literary Criticisms*, “Life in Poetry.”

for freedom, for the freedom of the heart and mind. . . . All poetry is emancipation, is a new life, a new freedom." But, as the writer goes on to say, this freedom is not freedom *from* our nature, it is freedom *in* our nature, in our highest nature.

#### THOUGHT AND TEACHING

Are we to expect from poetry teaching, improvement, guidance? Let me record two answers, seemingly opposite, to this question. We shall see if they may in some degree be reconciled. In a suggestive and charming book recently published <sup>1</sup> the author answers decisively, "Poetry does not teach: it inspires," and he goes on thus to justify this answer: "Those who would teach must before all things be logically clear; but the very essence of poetry is exactly what cannot be *intellectually* conceived or expressed: the poet is not a schoolmaster but a prophet." This is in keeping with his whole theory—that poetry is for enjoyment, that the two fundamental truths about poetry are that it is magic and that it is music, that its final test is that it communicates a mood, for the artist's function has little or nothing to do with the intellect, seeing that it presents not ideas but images, producing in us a definite state of feeling but having no meaning that can be "expressed in intellectual conceptions," that the *matter* of poetry is of quite secondary importance as compared with the *form*. In a lecture more recently delivered <sup>2</sup> the same

<sup>1</sup> *The Rudiments of Criticism*, by E. Greening Lamborn, referred to already more than once.

<sup>2</sup> At the University of Leeds on November 22, 1918, as reported in Bulletin No. 36 of the English Association. To Pamphlet No. 43 (May 1919) of the Association Mr Lamborn contributes a paper, "Poetry and the Child," in which the same views are expressed. "To

views are set forth: "We have been led astray by Browning and Whitman, and have forgotten that poetry is the language of the emotions, not of the intellect. . . . Intuitions and feelings are more fundamental to our personalities than our intellectual beliefs; and it is with that part of us that art is concerned. Poetry is, as Dante called it, a 'musical enchantment'; it is an incantation, a charm, which casts a spell on the hearer."

Over against this view, which is that of a not inconsiderable school of critics in our days, we have the view expressed in these words of James Russell Lowell, a discerning critic, and himself a poet of some merit: "If it be the delightful function of the poet to set our lives to music, perhaps he will be even more sure of our maturer gratitude if he do his part also as moralist and philosopher to purify and enlighten; if he define and encourage our vacillating perceptions of duty; if he piece together our fragmentary apprehensions of our own life and of that larger life whose unconscious instruments we are, making of the jumbled bits of our dissected map of experience a coherent chart." This was Arnold's view when he wrote that "the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of *ideas* to life—to the question: How to live." Browning put it in a more extreme form in one of his letters: "Philosophy first and poetry, which is its highest outcome, afterwards." Wordsworth wished to be "considered a teacher or nothing," and throughout the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and the supplementary look for any teaching in poetry is to misunderstand its essential nature. . . . Poetry has no message for our heads; it has no *meaning*—that is, no interpretation which can be expressed in any other form" (p. 28).



essay which he prefixed to the edition of 1815, while holding that poetry is an expression of the emotions and of the imagination, holds no less strongly that there must be great ideas and serious thoughts behind, so that the poet, in giving full rein to his inspiration, "shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the *understanding* (italics mine) of the reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified."

Let me add to these testimonies from writers of a past generation that of a writer of our own day whose opinion on this point merits high consideration were it only because of the truth and appreciative insight of his general views on poetry.<sup>1</sup> "If we are to appreciate good poetry," he writes, "we must awaken all our reason, and not merely give way to our emotions. . . . What the poet asks you to do is not to take an opiate that will dull your intellect, but, in fact, to lay aside your preoccupation in the trivialities of life, to disentangle yourself from the temporal and the accidental. . . ." And again: "The test of the true value of poetry to us lies in its power to convince us not merely as sentient but also as intelligent beings."

What is to be thought of the respective merits of these two views? I think one must recognize that while there are exaggerations on both sides, a moderate statement of what is true in each will bring us near the full truth. Let us look first from the view-point of Mr Lamborn and the school for which he speaks. Poetry is indeed an art. Its primary aim, then, is to impart æsthetic pleasure through its presentation of the beautiful.

<sup>1</sup> E. de Sélincourt, *The Study of Poetry*, 1918.



Instruction, improvement, teaching are therefore not the primary aim of poetry.<sup>1</sup> So much is clear. Again, from the poet's point of view the exercise of his art is largely dependent upon that mood which we call inspiration, upon those moments when, kindled by some emotion or some great idea, the imagination catches fire and the whole intellectual and sensitive being is raised to the pitch where the thought naturally utters itself in poetry.

Thoughts that voluntary move  
Harmonious numbers.

Then, as we have said, the music of language answers to the music of the mind. Now such a mood is wholly different from the calm deliberate frame of mind in which a man sits down with pen in hand to expound some intellectual theory or to circulate some moral precept. Verse composed in the latter mood, in cold blood, as it were, may be good philosophy or morality: it will scarcely be poetry.

Forget not, brother singer! that though Prose  
Can never be too truthful or too wise,  
Song is not Truth, not Wisdom, but the rose  
Upon Truth's lips, the light in Wisdom's eyes.<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising that poets—even great poets like Wordsworth, Arnold, and Browning—should have occasionally mistaken the mood. There is much versi-

<sup>1</sup> "Poetry or any one of the fine arts . . . can teach only as nature teaches, as forests teach, as the sea teaches, as infancy teaches, viz., by deep impulse, by hieroglyphic suggestion. Their teaching is not direct or explicit, but lurking, implicit, masked in deep incarnations. To teach formally and professedly is to abandon the very differential character and principle of Poetry." (De Quincey, essay on Pope.)

<sup>2</sup> Sir William Watson.

fied philosophy and—truth to tell—dreary moralizing in poems such as *The Excursion*, Cowper's *Task*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, *The Ring and the Book*, and *Aurora Leigh*. Lastly, from the point of view of the reader, to go to the poets *merely* in search of their views on ethics, theology, social problems and the rest, is to go to them in a wrong spirit. We must go to them for delight, for solace, for a deeper imaginative knowledge of nature and man, and deeper feeling. We must go to them to be stirred and to be inspired.

But when we have gone to them in the true spirit we find that, borne on the wings of their verse and hidden in its music, something beyond verse and music has entered almost unawares into our souls. For, if poetry is an art, it differs from all the other arts in this, that the material with which it works is shot through with the immaterial, the spiritual. Words written or spoken are sense-perceptible things like the pigments of the artist, but they are also signs of ideas that no sense can reach, or they are nothing, *vox et præterea nihil*. It follows that to use words solely for their qualities of sound or of appearance is to use them wrongly or at best imperfectly. To make verse out of words used for their sound-values alone is to reduce it to the level of a nonsense refrain—"Ri fol the dol fol the dol day" or "Hey diddle diddle."<sup>1</sup> And, in decadent poets like Stéphane Mallarmé,<sup>2</sup> who ruthlessly sacrifices sense to sound, that is what happens.

<sup>1</sup> I say nothing as to the use of words solely for their *sight* value, for no theorist (even of cubism) has maintained that poetry should take for its model the acrostic or the abracadabra.

<sup>2</sup> To say nothing of the poets of the present Dada Movement, which can fairly be described as the lunacy of literature.

Et tu fis la blancheur sanglotante des lys,  
 Qui, roulant sur des mers de soupirs qu'elle effleure,  
 A travers l'encens bleu des horizons pâlis  
 Monte rêveusement vers la lune qui pleure.<sup>1</sup>

This is language used solely for its qualities of sound, and perhaps for some vague suggestiveness of the words, making a faint echo in the imagination and sensibility. It is like poetry heard in a foreign language : occasionally where sound echoes sense in an unusual and remarkable manner, as in some passages of Homer, it even stirs the emotions, almost as it might stir them if understood. But that is certainly rare and not the case in some of the highest and most beautiful poetry. There must, then, be something more in poetry than the music of verse. Is that 'something' the pictures it paints for the 'mind's eye' to dwell upon ? In such pictures lies much, very much, of the pleasure of poetry. But the fact remains that, with pictures that are pictures and nothing more, the *mind* cannot rest wholly and permanently satisfied. Not that *every* picture must have a meaning beyond itself : the purely sensuous beauty of landscape has an æsthetic appeal of its own<sup>2</sup> ; but sooner or later our nature craves something *human*, a human emotion to give the aspects of nature a human interest, a great idea of which they are the symbols or the fleeting embodiments. The matter is clear in

<sup>1</sup> For other examples see *Le Dix-neuvième siècle*, par P. Longhaye, S.J., tome iii., pp. 356 *sqq.*

<sup>2</sup> And hence I cannot go the whole way with Coventry Patmore in his essay on poetical integrity. "The slightest touch of genuine humanity," he says, "is of more actual and poetic value than all that is not human that the sun shines on." To that I should scarcely demur. But what follows seems somewhat of an over-statement. "The interest of what is called 'descriptive' or 'representative' in real poetry is always human. . . . The state of mind is the



the case of dramatic poetry : music and pictures <sup>1</sup> make but a small part of its appeal. But it is hard to find even a lyric, however frail and slight, without an idea wrapped in its music ; the songs of Ariel, the songs in Tennyson's *Princess*, the songs in *Pippa Passes* convey ideas, however vaguely. Much more is this so with more elaborate or longer poems—sonnets, odes, elegies : they would lose half their interest, half their beauty even, were there no underlying ideas, nay, were they without some great master idea to give them unity and coherence. Else were they bodies without soul.<sup>2</sup>

Now when once we admit the presence of thought, of intellectual ideas as all but necessary to the full beauty and the full appeal of poetry, it seems to me that we accept poetry as, in a very real sense, teaching. If we do not so accept it, that must be because we take the poet's thoughts as mere playthings to dally with, not something to be received in seriousness and reverence even when we differ from it, because we look upon all poetry, as we look upon *vers de société*, as a light diversion for leisure hours. To look at poetry in this light is to

true subject, the natural phenomena the terms in which it is uttered." Thus wholly engrossed in the human aspects, should we not ignore or slight the sheer sensuous beauty of the thing as we see it ? Should we not pass over even that higher aspect of its beauty as a product of the Divine craftsmanship ? For

" not a flower

But shows some touch in freckle, streak, or stain  
Of His unrivalled pencil."

<sup>1</sup> The pictures indeed are for the most part imagery whereby abstract ideas are given a substance and brought home to the emotions through the imagination.

<sup>2</sup> " Any piece of Art which does not fulfil its obligations to truth and goodness as well as to beauty is necessarily faulty and incomplete." (Bliss Carman, *The Poetry of Life*.)



deny it all serious significance and so to stultify the judgment of the greatest minds in all times. For to thinking men, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, to say nothing of the great poets of Hebrew literature, are among the immortals

Who waged contention with their time's decay,  
And of the past are all that cannot pass away.

It may be true to say that without beauty of form the works of the poets could never have outlived the ravages of time: it is still more true that form alone could never have made them what they have been to the great world, not of artists but of common men—a well-spring of inspiration and of enlightenment, a veritable school of life.<sup>1</sup> No, poetry is, let me insist in the words of Walter Bagehot, “a deep thing, a teaching thing, the most surely and wisely elevating of human things.” Nor is there any inherent reason why poetry should not be a vehicle for the expression of high truths—“Great thoughts, deep thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end”—without sacrificing any of its essential qualities. “It deals,” says Mr Lamborn, “with images, not with ideas.” Is it not truer to say that it bodies forth ideas, even the most abstract, through the medium of images? It is the language of emotion, but more often than not of an emotion that is the reverberation of some great idea through our sensitive frame. A reasonable being needs a basis, so to speak, for his emotion. And as for the imagination, nothing fires the

<sup>1</sup> “Poetry, like science, though in its own peculiar way, has for its object the revelation of truth—its object is not pure emotion on the one hand, which is mere animal instinct, nor yet scientific truth on the other, which is often merely fact, but truth as applied to human life and experience, and revealed in terms of beauty.” (E. de Sélincourt, *loc. cit.*)

imagination of a poet like some great idea which is at bottom a great philosophic truth. But the poet must transfigure his philosophy with imagination and feeling, he must embody it in the music of language. Else he is writing philosophy and theology in verse, not poetry. If we are to accept the poet as teacher and moralist, we must first acknowledge him as a poet.

But in order to see that in poetry may be embodied sublime teaching, we have but to think of some of the great creations of poetic genius. The sacred books wherein is recorded the revelation of God to man are largely written in poetry—the Psalms, Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and much besides. It has been said of Dante's *Divina Commedia* that it is a poetic rendering of the *Summa* of St Thomas. Milton's *Paradise Lost* sets out with the high moral purpose of justifying the ways of God to men.<sup>1</sup> There may be prosaic moralizing in Wordsworth's *Excursion*, but his *Tintern Abbey* is the highest poetry instinct with the highest philosophic thought. The late Stopford Brooke's beautiful book, *Theology in the English Poets*, is not ill-named, and a book of Shakespeare's 'higher teaching' is as full of high thought as it is of poetry.<sup>2</sup> Of Newman's lyric *Lead, kindly light*, the late Wilfrid Ward said in his Lowell Lectures that in it "he spoke more truth than he could speak in any philosophic tome." Of Spenser, one of the most poetical of poets, Aubrey

<sup>1</sup> We shall presently deal with the relations of *religion* to poetry.

<sup>2</sup> For example, *The Light of Shakespeare: Passages illustrative of the Higher Teaching of Shakespeare's Dramas*, by Clare Langton (Elliot Stock, 1897). Lamb spoke of Shakespeare's plays as "enrichers of the fancy, strengtheners of virtue, a withdrawing from all selfish and mercenary thoughts, a lesson of all sweet and honourable actions, teaching courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity."

de Vere writes<sup>1</sup>: "If it were asked what chiefly constitutes the merit of his poetry, the answer would commonly be, its descriptive power or its chivalrous sentiment, or its exquisite sense of beauty; yet the quality which he himself desiderated most for his chief work was one not often found in union with these, viz., sound and true philosophic thought. This characteristic is perhaps his highest." And these remarks are occasioned by the *Faerie Queene*, surely a work of high art.

Newman, in an essay on poetry written in 1829, dwells on how *philosophy*, even that most abstract department of it, metaphysics, is subdued to poetry not alone in Shakespeare but in the Waverley Novels, and even in Crabbe's *Tales of the Hall*. "What, after all," says Brunetière, "is poetry but metaphysics made manifest through sensible images?" And, though they teach only by hints and parables and brief flashes of thought, we may well seek in the poets the materials for those interpretations of man and his life which, rationalized and systematized, we call philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

And as regards *moral* teaching, though it is no more the primary purpose of the poet to teach morality than it is for him to teach philosophy, yet he can scarcely avoid the teaching of morality, whether for good or for evil. Listen to Sir Philip Sidney: "The poet beginneth not with obscure definitions, but he cometh to you

<sup>1</sup> *Essays Chiefly on Poetry*, "Spenser as a Philosophic Poet."

<sup>2</sup> In *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher*, by Henry Jones, this thought is elaborated. "Shakespeare," says Shelley, "Dante, and Milton are philosophers of the very loftiest power." "No man," wrote Coleridge, "was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher" (*Biographia Literaria*).



with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with or prepared for the well-enchanting skill of music ; and with a tale, forsooth, he cometh to you with a tale, which holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner, and, pretending no more, doth intend the winning of them from wickedness to virtue, even as the child is often brought to taste most wholesome things by hiding them in such others as have a pleasant taste. . . . So it is in men (most of them are childish in the best things till they be cradled in their graves) ; glad they will be to hear the tales of Hercules, Achilles, Cyrus, Æneas ; and hearing them must needs hear the right description of wisdom, valour, justice ; which if they had been barely (that is to say philosophically) set out, they would swear they be brought to school again.”<sup>1</sup> Yes, “hearing them must needs hear”—that is the gist of the matter. The poet set out to tell a beautiful tale, or to immortalize a mood, and behold he has taught us, because the things themselves have taught us. But even if his (secondary) purpose be to teach, why need the result be bad art ? We rate low certain didactic poetry, but that is not because it is didactic, but because it is not poetry,<sup>2</sup> because the poet made himself a preacher or a pedagogue, instead of an inspired singer.

There may be some over-statement in this contention of John Morley,<sup>3</sup> but I think it may be endorsed in the main : “ One great creative poet probably exerts a nobler, deeper, more permanent ethical influence than a dozen

<sup>1</sup> *Defence of Poesie*.

<sup>2</sup> See W. H. Hudson, *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*, new edition, pp. 118 *sqq.*

<sup>3</sup> *Studies in Literature*, “ The Ring and the Book.”



generations of professed moral teachers." For as Newman insists, in an essay on poetry already referred to, though of course a poet need not necessarily display virtuous and religious feeling, still "a right moral state of heart is the formal and scientific condition of a poetical mind." And, in proportion as his heart lacks that right moral state and becomes vicious, the quality of his poetry is debased, its beauty is tarnished. Men who at heart are morally sound and uncorrupted, command as from its centre the whole circuit of poetry. Such men were Milton, Spenser; Shakespeare, Cowper, Wordsworth, Southey, Scott, as mirrored in their writings—and we might add not a few who have flourished since Newman wrote.

#### POETRY AND RELIGION

"Nowhere," said Francis Turner Palgrave in the preface to his *Treasury of Sacred Song*, "is the power and magic of poetry as an art more naturally in place than when her inspiring muses are Faith, Hope, and Love," the fitting attitude of man toward his Maker. It would be interesting and fruitful, did space permit, to trace the interconnexions between poetry and religion in its various aspects—doctrinal, devotional, mystic, liturgical. The great truths and mysteries of religion mark the sublimest flights that thought can reach.<sup>1</sup> The mystic relations of the soul with God call forth the exercise of man's highest faculties, perhaps especially that imaginative insight which is the peculiarly poetic faculty: devotion has its emotions and its aspirations, liturgy the poetry of its symbolisms.

<sup>1</sup> See "The Poetry of Christian Dogma" in G. Santayana's book, *Religion and Poetry*.

In all these aspects there are the elements of beauty : they cry out for poetical expression. And, historically, they have found such expression. Religion has been the inspiration of some of the world's greatest poems. It suffices to mention Dante's *Divina Commedia* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. And to-day, age of doubt and denial though it be, religion still continues to inspire some of the noblest of our modern poetry. In such a poem as *The Hound of Heaven* the mystic relations of the soul with God have found meet poetic expression.<sup>1</sup>

It would seem, indeed, that between the religious spirit and the spirit of poetry there exists some special kinship. Certainly religion and poetry have much in common. Their appeal, to begin with, is equally to the human in man ; not to men as members of this class or that, as exercising one function or another, but to man as man. Again, poetry and religion alike move at home in an ideal world : their native abiding place is a region raised above this workaday world, though not unconcerned with it—transcendent but not aloof. They have a like sense of the mystery of the universe—a mystery which is the presence and operation of an infinite Mind. They do not content themselves with the show of things, but stand in a like attitude of reverent wonder before what they know to be but a veil

<sup>1</sup> It is not without interest in this connexion to note the remarkable output in recent years (not alone in English-speaking countries, but in France and elsewhere) of volumes of poetry by Catholic priests. Let me recall some names known to most Catholic readers of poetry in these countries : Canon Sheehan, Fathers M. Russell, M. Watson, W. Power, G. O'Neill, E. Garesché, J. B. Tabb, M. Earls, M. T. Henry, H. E. G. Rope, T. E. Bridgett, Gerard Hopkins, R. H. Benson, K. D. Best, etc. To an earlier generation belonged Cardinal Newman, Fathers F. W. Faber, Abraham Ryan, and Ryder.

or vesture of a Presence behind. Poetry, like religion, has

A sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;  
A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.<sup>1</sup>

Not always, alas, did the poet see in Nature the realized thought of God. Yet a poet who believed himself godless could write these words :

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,  
That Beauty in which all things work and move,  
That Benediction which the eclipsing curse  
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love  
Which, through the web of being blindly wove  
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,  
Burns bright or dim as each are mirrors of  
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,  
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.<sup>2</sup>

For proof, if proof were needed, of this natural kinship one need but cast a backward glance along the history of poetry. Have not all those gropings after true religion, the mythologies of the ancient world—India, Persia, Greece, and Rome—expressed themselves in poetry? In poetry, too, the religion of the true God has expressed itself almost from the first. From the primitive lay that sang the dawn of things to that marvellous poem that utters to a world grown old the deepest things of life and destiny—the Book of Job—the Old Testament is full of poetry. From Genesis to

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*.

<sup>2</sup> Shelley, *Adonais*.



Maccabees, hymns, songs, and canticles are scattered in well-nigh every book, and in the Magnificat and the Benedictus they flow over into the Gospels.<sup>1</sup> As for the Christian Church, "her very being," as Newman said, "is poetry." She took the poets into her service and made poetry and song a part of her most solemn ritual. Poems are read in the Mass. Hebrew poetry, coupled with newer Latin hymns, is the main burden of the Divine Office. The great saints and doctors contributed to her hymnology, while not a few of them, from Gregory Nazianzen to John of the Cross, and after him even to our own times, wrote also poetry that was non-liturgical.<sup>2</sup> Much of the greatest poetry of Spain has been written within the cloister.<sup>3</sup>

And not less have the 'p̄ropane' poets—the greatest of them—used their art to utter the highest things of religion. Dante's *Divina Commedia* has been described as "theology in ecstasy and transports, yet theology firm and rational."<sup>4</sup> From Calderon, one of the great

<sup>1</sup> In his new translation of the New Testament Dr Moffatt has (with what propriety I do not wish to judge) printed in the form of verse a considerable number of our Lord's own sayings.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, St Alphonsus Liguori, St Francis of Assisi, St Bernard, St Thomas Aquinas, Bl. Henry Suso. There is in the works of Frederic Ozanam an interesting study of early Franciscan poets.

<sup>3</sup> One may see this in any collection of Spanish poetry, even in one so small as *Las Cien Mejores Poesias*, published by Gowans and Gray, Glasgow, at 6d.

<sup>4</sup> Lionel Johnson. A very recent book that may be helpful—its aims and method, at all events, are right—is *Dante: An Elementary Book for those who seek in the Great Poet the Teacher of Spiritual Life*, by Henry Dwight Sedgwick (Newhaven: Yale University Press; London: Milford), 1920. It leaves aside all the learning that has gathered round Dante and his poetry and deals with Dante as a poet and as a teacher of spiritual and eternal truths for an age of doubt.



poets of Spain, we have for instance the *Autos Sacramentales*, that have been translated by one of our own poets.<sup>1</sup> France, whose great writers nearly all wrote in the full Catholic tradition, has produced strangely few religious poets. Among them may be numbered Racine for his *Athalie* and *Esther*, if not for his hymns and psalms, and Corneille. Lamartine, in spite of some aberrations, is perhaps the greatest French poet of religion, though in certain respects he may have been surpassed by very recent writers. These last few years have seen a revival of French religious poetry.<sup>2</sup> Yet the plaint of Sully-Prudhomme might still, I think, be repeated with justice, that religious poems (*poèmes sacrés*) are "plus rares malheureusement chez nous que dans la littérature étrangère." I shall mention presently some collections of French religious poetry.

The literature of England, also, has its religious poets, but in her case the loss of religious unity just before her greatest literary outburst has divided the streams of Helicon into several channels. One cannot indeed class English religious poets simply according to the religion they profess: there is little Catholicism in the work of the Catholic, Pope, while the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti is imbued with Catholicism. The Catholic tradition has given to English literature Chaucer, Dunbar, Crashaw,<sup>3</sup> Southwell, Dryden, and,

<sup>1</sup> Denis Florence M'Carthy. Published under the title *Mysteries of Corpus Christi*, Dublin, 1866.

<sup>2</sup> To name only contemporaries, there are Claudel, Péguy, Jammes, Le Cardonnel, Mercier, Vallery-Radot, Mauriac, Brou, Gasquet, Perroy.

<sup>3</sup> His religious poems have been republished as a volume in the Catholic Library (Manresa Press), as have also the poems of Father Southwell.

nearer to our own day, Moore, Newman, Aubrey de Vere, Coventry Patmore, Francis Thompson, and not a few singers who are living yet.<sup>1</sup> The Anglican Church has found a voice in Henry Vaughan, Quarles, Herbert, Donne, Hawker, Christina Rossetti, J. M. Neale, Keble. Adelaide Anne Procter passed from one tradition into the other; while Puritanism gave Milton and Marvell to English literature. Yet, when all is said, religion has perhaps found a larger utterance in poets who cannot be classed as religious—in Shakespeare and Coleridge and Wordsworth, Longfellow and Browning and Rossetti.

Ireland, where religion is nearer the heart of the people than in any other land, and has so been, with intervals comparatively brief, since religion first reached us, has contributed no noteworthy religious poet to English literature. But the literature of her native tongue is soaked with religion, and that religion has constantly expressed itself in poetry. Readers who would judge this for themselves might take as samples, so to speak, Dr Douglas Hyde's volumes of *Religious Songs of Connaught* and Dr Sigerson's *Bards of the Gael and Gall*. One may well doubt whether the devotional aspect of the religious spirit has ever found expression more exquisite in its simplicity than in some of the poems the latter translates from the literature of the Christian Dawn in Ireland. In Mr A. P. Graves's recent volume, *Irish Literary and Musical Studies*, will

<sup>1</sup> See *The Poets' Chantry*, by Katherine Brégy (Herbert and Daniel), 1912, which deals with Southwell, Habington, Crashaw, Aubrey de Vere, Gerard Hopkins, Patmore, Lionel Johnson, Francis Thompson, and Alice Meynell. In Miss Geraldine Hodgson's much too modestly named *Criticism at a Venture*, 1919, there is a chapter of much interest and value entitled "The Poetry of Faith."

be found an interesting sketch of "Early Irish Religious Poetry." <sup>1</sup>

## UTILITIES

There are minds which cannot rest in any possible object of desire unless they can see in it some relation with the useful. For these also poetry has its appeal. In a sense the artistic is the very antithesis of the useful. Utilitarianism, as Bergson points out,<sup>2</sup> is one of those things which casts between us and the beauty of the world and of man a veil which art seeks to draw aside. To look upon an object on its useful side is, for the nonce, to cease to regard its artistic, its beautiful side. The aim of poetry is, then, in no sense utility in its narrower meaning. "Though in the material sense," says a writer whom I have already quoted,<sup>3</sup> "it is true that 'all art is useless,' yet in a deeper and far more real sense 'studies that serve for delight,' like poetry, are the very end for which utilitarian science and skill exist; we learn and labour to provide material things in order that we may enjoy spiritual things. But that poetry is not <sup>4</sup> a means of supplying useful information . . . or improving the morals, or providing sage axioms or grammatical examples, or serving any practical purpose, let us with joy admit and declare. It is the charm and the glory of poetry that its high and single purpose is 'to make glad the heart of man.' " And the fulfilment of this purpose is itself a utility. What is

<sup>1</sup> In Appendix B, page 202, will be found a list of the principal modern collections of poetry dealing with religious themes.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Rire : Essai sur la Signification du Comique*.

<sup>3</sup> E. Greening Lamborn, *The Rudiments of Criticism*, introduction.

<sup>4</sup> That is, not directly and professedly.



this high gladness, this pleasure of our sensitive and intelligent being? Is it not acquiescence in the intensified activity of our highest powers and faculties? Now poetry, as Shelley said so well, "strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to the sense." And few will gainsay his conclusion, "The production and assurance of pleasure in this highest sense is true utility."

If, then, poetry be capable of fulfilling that high mission which we have claimed for it, if it be a source of pure delight, an anodyne for souls sick of a world "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable," a power to uplift us from low desires into the atmosphere of the ideal, and a teacher of deep truths,—if it be all this, not the most callous utilitarian but will acknowledge that it fulfils a useful function in the world.

#### A SUMMARY

In an essay on the poets of the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup> Lionel Johnson thus sums up our debt to them: "The poetry of the nineteenth century has taught us to look upon nature with new eyes, found fresh means of escape from materialism, bidden us comprehend the soul of past ages, quickened our insight and research into the soul of man, made both optimism and pessimism more profound, liberated verse from its chains, sung to a larger music in a richer tongue, insisted upon the mystery of things, restored the spirit of romance, extended its provinces on every side, and helped it to become a spiritual power."

<sup>1</sup> *Post Liminium*, p. 123.



## PART III

### LEARNING TO LOVE POETRY <sup>1</sup>

#### I. THE NEED OF STUDY

I SHOULD feel richly rewarded if the considerations that have been set forth should bring conviction of the high worth of poetry to any that had till then given no heed to it. But my task does not end with the creating of that conviction. The good-will may be there, no doubt. But not by willing alone can one gain all that poetry has to offer. Nothing, indeed, that is worth having is to be gained without effort—may I be pardoned the commonplace—and it is so with a taste for at least the higher forms of poetry. I say the higher forms, for it is easy to exaggerate the need, for the due appreciation of poetry, of critical preparation and training. Some reservations are certainly necessary. Let me show the matter by means of some examples. Take this simple lyric by a writer who died but a very short time ago : <sup>2</sup>

A little sun, a little rain,  
A soft wind blowing from the west,  
And woods and fields are sweet again  
And warmth within the mountain's breast.

<sup>1</sup> In this section I am indebted for several suggestions to *The Study of Poetry*, by E. de Sélincourt, English Association Pamphlet No. 40, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> *Earth and the Man*, by the late Stopford A. Brooke.

So simple is the earth we tread,  
So quick with love and life her frame ;  
Ten thousand years have dawned and fled,  
And still her magic is the same.

A little love, a little trust,  
A soft impulse, a sudden dream,  
And life as dry as desert dust  
Is fresher than a mountain stream.

So simple is the heart of man,  
So ready for new hope and joy ;  
Ten thousand years since it began  
Have left it younger than a boy.

I think it will be agreed that to appreciate the beauty and truth of that little poem little else is needed than an average mind to understand and a heart to feel. And this poem is typical of a large class of poetry, the poetry which deals in simple language with those human emotions and fancies which are the heritage of all of us. There is much poetry of this kind in the works of the great poets. One has only to recall at random such lyrics as Wordsworth's *The Cuckoo* and *The Solitary Reaper*, Burns's and Moore's and Scott's songs, Matthew Arnold's *Requiescat*, Tennyson's *The May Queen*, and the greater part of Longfellow's lyric poetry. In the case of contemporary poets in particular this need of preliminary study is often not very great, because we live ourselves in the general environment in which their poems were written. On the other hand, the greater the length of time that has gone by since the poet wrote, the greater, as a rule, is the need for study, if we are to appreciate his writings to the full. Yet even among poets of an epoch wholly different from our own and long passed away we find poems that the first comer can

understand and enjoy. Such, I think, is the following from George Herbert, who flourished in the days of James I :

When God at first made man,  
Having a glass of blessings standing by ;  
Let us (said He) pour on him all we can :  
Let the world's riches, which disperséd lie,  
Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way ;  
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure :  
When almost all was out God made a stay,  
Perceiving that alone of all His treasure  
Rest in the bottom lay.

For if I should (said He)  
Bestow this jewel also on My creature,  
He would adore My gifts instead of Me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature :  
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,  
But keep them with repining restlessness ;  
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,  
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
May toss him to My breast.

Even from the comparatively far-off days of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans there have come down to us lyrics that might almost have been written yesterday.

From another point of view also a similar reservation must be made. It is this, that, for aught I know, there may be many to whose minds the minor forms of poetry have a greater appeal than have its highest flights. There may very well be those who will gain a truer solace and a more genuine delight from Adelaide Anne Procter<sup>1</sup> than from Milton. Are such to be despised

A poet, be it said, of true poetic worth.

and set down as Philistines? Surely not. But most of what I have now to say is for such as feel the desire to appreciate what the verdict of the world has pronounced to be the highest in poetry. It is with poetry somewhat as with music. Some care nothing for music because they lack the faculty that could appreciate it. Some care only for the popular forms of music, for dance tunes and simple melodies and the like. Others, again, aspire to understand and enjoy the works of the great masters—classical music, as it is called. And these last have the deeper delight and the greater uplifting.

These reservations, however, being made, it is true to say that the taste for good poetry needs cultivation—is, in fact, an acquired taste. Such taste is not a mere instinct: it is instinct trained. There are such things as principles of literary taste, laws of literary criticism, in other words, laws and principles for the guidance of our judgment in discriminating, as far as such discrimination is possible, between what is good and bad or good and mediocre in a piece of literature.<sup>1</sup> To those who have

<sup>1</sup> Mindful of the way in which the movement somewhat vaguely called the Romantic Revival has broken through certain once accepted canons of criticism, the tendency of some modern critics is toward a general distrust of all literary principles whatever. An extreme example of this tendency is the Romanes Lecture delivered by the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour under the title *Criticism and Beauty*, and subsequently published. His conclusion is that there exist no means of judging the presence or absence of beauty or sublimity or any such quality in any work of art, no way of distinguishing between beauty and ugliness. This is beautiful for me: it is ugly for you—there is no more to be said. I cannot but think that this amounts to a denial of the fundamental unity of human nature and of the essential objectivity and absoluteness of truth, and as such I repudiate it. But the matter goes to the roots of philosophy, and here is not the place to discuss it.



a grasp of such principles and laws, whether from general culture or from express study of them,<sup>1</sup> the higher pleasures and emoluments of literature are reserved.

This, then, is the first requisite for the full appreciation of poetry—the training of our judgment and æsthetic sense in the principles of literary taste. A second is the possession of the actual knowledge required for the full understanding of a poem in all its bearings. To get from a poem all that its author put into it—and the same in a measure is true of any piece of literary composition—a certain acquaintance with its author's mind is needed. Again, to know his mind we need to make acquaintance with his personality and with his environment. And, besides his mind, we need to understand his medium of expression—the words he uses, his metres and rhythms. Lastly, it is at least interesting to study the sources of his inspiration. Without some such knowledge, whether gleaned by personal effort and research, or, as must for the most part be the case, provided for us by the industry of others in the form of note and comment, much of the value and even of the literal meaning of poets such as Shakespeare and Milton and Spenser<sup>2</sup> will certainly escape us. The value of such critical or, speaking generally, editorial apparatus is well set forth by Mr Balfour in the lecture from the negative conclusions of which I have ventured to differ. He says: "There are many cases where special knowledge does serve to

<sup>1</sup> They will be found in any good treatise of rhetoric or the art of speaking and writing.

<sup>2</sup> Many readers of poetry will be glad of the help afforded in such a work as Professor A. A. Jack's *A Commentary on the Poetry of Chaucer and Spenser*, 1920.

heighten emotion [or, shall we say, appreciation]; indeed, there are cases where, without that knowledge, no emotion would be felt at all. A case in point is where a work of art seems nearly unmeaning, considered out of its historic setting, and yet shines with significant beauty when that setting has been provided for us by the labour of the critic."

I wish, therefore, to offer here, as far as the scope of this work allows, some practical suggestions for the study of poetry under the two main heads that I have just indicated.

## 2. TRAINING OF THE TASTE FOR POETRY

Such a heading may at first sight appear somewhat formidable in what it seems to suggest. One had thought that taste was a peculiarly individual and, moreover, a spontaneous thing. But 'training' seems to imply that taste is to be drilled according to recognized and uniform standards, or—to change the metaphor—forced into ready-made moulds, that one is to be told to admire this and to eschew that, to see, not with one's own eyes, but with the eyes of another. In reality it is not so, or at least need not be so. Let us take a parallel case. Few travellers will deny the usefulness of a guide-book. No doubt it occasionally steps outside its sphere and, like one of those living guides that are the plague of travellers, descants upon matters that are not its concern. We do not ask from a guide-book glowing descriptions of scenery and fervid exhortations to admire this or that. But we are grateful to it for other things—to have our attention called to features that we might not have noticed, to have the way to beauty-spots pointed out to us, to be informed as to

what places are by common consent held to be beauty-spots, and in what conditions such beauty-spots may best be enjoyed. All this is the legitimate function of a guide-book and need not fetter us in our enjoyment by filling us with preconceived likes and dislikes. For taste is not just a readiness to conform our judgments to some external standard, accepting undiscerningly as excellent what the prevailing fashion, or the opinion of our elders, or the critics, accepts as excellent. It is something within us, one of the springs and instincts of our human nature. Like all our other instincts, it may be cultivated or checked, directed or diverted. Ruskin calls it "the faculty of receiving the greatest possible pleasure from those material sources which are attractive to our human nature in its purity and perfection."<sup>1</sup> Which 'material sources' (not a perfectly chosen term, perhaps) may be summed up, when we speak of poetry, as the beauty—physical, spiritual, intellectual, or moral—which is discernible in any particular poem. Now something can surely be done, by those who have it in a high degree, to foster and educate this faculty in those in whom it is as yet rudimentary.

It is so with all the arts. If we are to appreciate their products thoroughly it is helpful to have principles to guide and standards to look to, and such principles and standards do not fetter our judgment, for they are not the arbitrary rules of pedants but conclusions drawn from the works of acknowledged masters, the outcome of gradually accumulated experience, the sifted judg-

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Painters*, vol. i., section i., ch. vi. And Hazlitt calls it "sensitivity to the different degrees and kinds of excellence in works of art or nature."



ments of generations of competent critics. Now how are these principles and standards to be studied? In the first place it is well to acquire a good grasp of *what poetry is*, to understand in what it essentially consists. Not that we need seek an exact and final definition, but only such a general description as may give us a sufficient notion of the nature and function of poetry. In preceding sections I have tried to set forth such a notion.

Next should be studied the *elements* or ingredients of poetry. As has been already suggested, we may distinguish three elements: (1) the form or manner; (2) the matter, subject, or theme; and (3) the spirit. The division is rather convenient than strictly philosophical, but convenience is at the moment our object.

(1) *Form*.—Under this heading may be studied the relations of poetry to certain other arts,<sup>1</sup> viz. :

- (a) Its relation to music—metre, assonance, alliteration, and all its other appeals to the *ear*.
- (b) Its relation to painting—that is to say, its picturing power, and in particular its employment of imagery.
- (c) Its relation to architecture—that is, the structure, the architectonic of great poems, is perhaps best studied as an element of *all* literary composition, whether in prose or in verse.
- (d) Its relation to prose in respect of form—that is to say, the extent to which, and the manner in which, its use of diction and of the various devices of style differs from the usage of prose.

<sup>1</sup> "Poetry," says Leigh Hunt, "includes whatsoever of painting can be made visible to the mind's eye and whatsoever of music can be conveyed by sound and proportion without singing or instrumentation."



The first and fourth of these constituents of poetic form (all of which, albeit indirectly, concern the matter or subject also) are dealt with elsewhere in the present work, though only in the most general way. How the study of them may be followed up I shall point out presently.

(2) *Subject-matter*.—The themes of poetry are not, as we have seen, other than those of prose, however vastly prose and poetry, or rather science and poetry, may differ in their manner of treating these themes. They therefore do not need to be studied separately from the themes of prose, and more need not be said here.

(3) *The Poetic Spirit*.—How may we learn to detect the presence of the poetic spirit, to appreciate it in the degree of which we are capable, to draw from it the full measure of profit and delight? It may be thought that for this no learning is necessary, that the untaught human mind thrills naturally in presence of beauty, whether it be the beauty of outward form or the beauty of sweet sound or the beauty that is in poetry. For even though we may not yield assent to the teaching on pre-existence in the most splendid of Wordsworth's odes,<sup>1</sup> yet may we not believe that the soul, come from God's hands, with the Maker's image still fresh upon it, must be capable, as by some inborn instinct, of hailing with familiar recognition beauty and truth and goodness where they are to be found? May we not, then, leave nature to itself for our enjoyment of poetry as of all else? There is in such a contention an element of truth which may be gladly acknowledged. We do notice in many

<sup>1</sup> *The Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*.

children what seems a natural inborn appreciation of poetry in its simpler forms. But those who would leave nature to itself forget, in the first place, that, though the soul be heaven-born, it is "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined,"

While this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in !

that though, while perfect innocence lasts, the soul may bear undimmed the image of its Maker, soon "shades of the prison-house begin to close," the pressure of material things comes gradually to tell, and, as it grows to manhood, worldliness, to say nothing of moral evil, tarnishes its brightness, till it mirrors but dimly truth and goodness and beauty.<sup>1</sup> To put the matter more simply, the conditions of a boy's upbringing, the surroundings of his daily life, are seldom such as not in some measure to dim his perception of beauty and to mar his taste. But, further, it is only the simplest poetry that can be understood and appreciated at an early age. Much of the greatest poetry is quite beyond the ken of childhood. Therefore the moment when appreciation is called for comes at a time when childhood has been left behind and with it that fresh, unhindered expansion of the soul to beauty which Wordsworth looked back upon with such fond regret.

How, then, is appreciation of the spirit of poetry to be gained, or, if you prefer, in some measure recovered ?

<sup>1</sup> Heredity, too, must have its influence. Literary tradition creates a certain atmosphere which stunts or intensifies, as the case may be, the tendencies of individuals. Ireland is in this respect unique. Her literary tradition was in the great mass of the population for generations calculatedly extinguished. And the results are with us yet.

There is, I believe, no royal road to it, no specific course that will unfailingly result in its acquisition. The study of æsthetics,<sup>1</sup> the science of the beautiful, may not give it. No artistic training, no study of the principles of criticism is quite sufficient. For the appeal of poetry is mainly to the emotions and the imagination. Unless emotion answers to emotion, and the mind's eye be open to the picture painted by the poet's fancy, poetry appeals in vain. An imagination open to all the wonder and beauty of the world, ready to soar with the poet's, a heart ready to stir in sympathy with all joys and sorrows of our kind, not sentimental but deeply feeling—these things, as an equipment for the appreciation of poetry, are of far greater moment than any æsthetic training of the intellect. Now the training of the emotions and the imagination is no less a part of the general function of education than the training of the intellect.<sup>2</sup> Let general education do its work thoroughly and the capacity to appreciate poetry will be acquired.

It is to be presumed that a first venture into the realm of poetry is made, not in the class-room, but, long before, in the nursery. The old nursery rimes and their newer substitutes have a part to play in the training of the taste for poetry. They at least minister to and foster

<sup>1</sup> I do not know whether the average reader would gain a sense of the beautiful from modern treatises on æsthetics, but in so far as a feeling for the beautiful can be gained from books at all it might well be gained from Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and from some of his minor treatises on art. But a certain maturity of mind is, of course, needed if one is to gain by such reading.

<sup>2</sup> And one of education's best means for this training is precisely poetry. The taste for poetry can come only from the reading and hearing of poetry.



the child's natural liking for rhythm and rime, and it would, from our present point of view, be a pity were such a liking to remain unsatisfied. Moreover, what has come to be known to them from the first as a source of enjoyment will be the less likely to appear to them later as an irksome and wearisome task.

Once the nursery stage has been left behind, it seems clear that the main aim henceforth must be to introduce the young mind to the great poets. But it will not at first be capable of appreciating some of their higher flights or, to change the metaphor, their deeper probings. And therefore in those earlier stages, which for readers of these pages are a thing of the half-forgotten past, use should be made of poetry specially selected for the young. There exist many anthologies of such selected poetry. A list of some of these will be found in Appendix B. It is not, of course, exhaustive, and does not include the many series of readers and reciters specially prepared for schools.

It may perhaps be noticed that I have mentioned in the Appendix referred to none of the many books of poetry specially written for children. I have omitted them for several reasons. The very little ones are amused, no doubt, by nursery rimes and jingles, but we are here concerned with children who have left the nursery. The verses written specially for children of from eight to fourteen or so are often pretty and pleasant, but they are seldom poetry, and a great proportion of them, it must be admitted, are feeble and insignificant. Besides, the fact is that children for the most part do not care for poetry thus written down to their level, whereas there are plenty of poems written by the great poets which children can appreciate and



love. Why give them second-rate modern substitutes by minor versifiers in place of poems worthy to be enshrined in memory for all their years to come? <sup>1</sup>

There should be at this stage much reading aloud <sup>2</sup> of poetry, whether in the home <sup>3</sup> or at school. Such poems as Longfellow's *Wayside Tales* and *Evangeline* and *Hiawatha*, or, again, *Hohenlinden*, *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, *Young Lochinvar*, *The Burial of King Cormac*, the *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, might be read for the interest of their story, and poems such as Tennyson's *The Lotos-Eaters* and Milton's *Lycidas* for their melody. Young people will enjoy the swing of Tennyson's *The Revenge* and Browning's *Hervé Riel*, the lilt of Newbolt and Kipling, and the spring chorus of Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*. Poetry thus read sometimes leaves, as the writer can testify, an impression that the years can scarcely efface. And I do not know how else children may be made to feel that poetry is music. It has been said truly enough that people who do not care for poetry have never learned to listen for the music in it, often have never realized that it is there.

It would be a mistake to confine the study of poetry to the English literature class. In language classes, for instance, the poetry of other peoples is often studied, and the occasion might well be seized to compare it

<sup>1</sup> I cannot too strongly commend to any reader of this book who has at heart the education of children an altogether admirable essay by Agnes Repplier—"The Children's Poets." It is included in a volume of her essays entitled *Essays in Idleness*.

<sup>2</sup> Not so much by children themselves, for they have not the voice nor the power of expression that can do justice to a piece of good poetry, but by one who has learned to feel the poetic qualities of what he reads, and knows how to bring them out.

<sup>3</sup> The writer can never appreciate enough what such reading aloud of poetry did for his own childhood.

with the more familiar poetry, to treat it, at all events, as literature. Again, poetry has a part to play in the history class. Both studies would be gainers thereby, poetry because the occasion is thus afforded of showing its application to things that have a different appeal to learners, history because poetry is one of the best ways of making live again the emotions, the passions of the past, which is as needful for the full understanding of history as is the narrative of its outward happenings. Thus Aytoun's *Flodden*, Longfellow's *Paul Revere's Ride*, Davis's *Fontenoy*, Browning's *Cavalier Tunes* bring back the past to young people in a way no history book can do. In the history class it has a further mission as an inspirer of patriotism. Poetry, too, ought to find its way into the "Nature Study" class, where certainly it might well find itself at home. Mr Alfred Miles, in *A Garland of Verse* (an anthology), has a section devoted to "an attempt to provide materials for nature study from the poetic side."

Whether much poetry should be *learned by heart* is a moot question. Certain it is that for many the *manner* in which they have been made to learn poetry has made them hate it for the rest of their lives. Surely a teacher, when he makes his pupils learn by heart, ought to do all in his power to make the task a pleasure. Let him make them eager to learn by showing first the beauty, or at all events the interest and value, of the piece to be learned, and let the amount so to be committed to memory be quite within their powers of learning. And clearly, if it is not to be a mere parrot-like repetition, the learner ought to understand at least the general meaning of what he is asked to learn. It is for the teacher to make sure of this beforehand. Finally, if

he can find time to read it as a whole once or twice aloud to them, that will go far to ease their effort by calling the ear to the help of the eye.

Quite young children sometimes learn poetry with astonishing ease and with unfeigned delight. They will be happy indeed if they find some one who will choose for them the best and thus make their memories a little Golden Treasury of beautiful thoughts and words—a possession for ever. In my school-days—I suppose it has been the experience of many of my contemporaries—I was made to commit to memory whole cantos of Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Lord of the Isles*, *Marmion*, and *Rokeby*. Was such time and toil well spent? Looking back one may well think that if the really fine things had been chosen out and learned with thoroughness and relish they would not so quickly and entirely have dropped out of memory.

Ought school boys and girls to be taught or encouraged to *write verse*? It is a matter upon which I cannot quote the results of much personal experience. But there seems every reason to think that such exercises ought to be highly educational. They might well lead to the appreciation of poetry, just as the serious attempt to sketch or paint may lead to appreciation of good pictures. And I think that Max Eastman<sup>1</sup> is right in saying that the best path to the enjoyment of poetry lies through the creation of it. Why should it, as in Ireland at least it is, be neglected, whereas boys are taught to produce, for the most part by dint of irksome labour, dubious verse in dead languages? I must refer the reader to a book which I have mentioned and shall presently have occasion to recommend in general.

<sup>1</sup> *The Enjoyment of Poetry*, preface. And see the whole of ch. xiv.



The chapter on "Children's Exercises" in Mr E. G. Lamborn's *Rudiments of Criticism* might well be read by all teachers of English. I would also refer to a most suggestive article by the Rev. Professor George O'Neill, S.J., which appeared in the Irish quarterly review, *Studies*, in June 1915. It is entitled "Students as Verse-makers," and records a successful experiment. From a point of view quite other than the appreciation of poetry, verse-writing is useful: it is an aid to the acquisition of a good prose style.<sup>1</sup> "I want you," said Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, in 1915, from his professorial chair in Cambridge, "I want you to practise verse and to practise it assiduously. . . . I say the youth of a university ought to practise verse-writing."<sup>2</sup>

Such attempts at literary expression in verse are, if rightly directed, exercises of the imagination, a faculty that demands, no less than understanding and memory, to be strengthened and guided. Even apart from the writing of verse, any educative training that results in the enlargement of the imagination is a gain for poetry, because it is an enlargement of the power

<sup>1</sup> As such it is recommended by so exceedingly 'practical' a writer as Flora Klickman. See *The Lure of the Pen*, 1919, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> *The Art of Writing* (Cambridge University Press), 1916, p. 37. Such verses ought to be written with the help and encouragement of some guide, friend, parent, or teacher who possesses already a cultivated taste for poetry and some knowledge of its technique. In default of such a guide, help may be found in books on the art of versification, such, for instance, as Miss S. Gertrude Ford's recently published *Lessons in Verse Craft* (Daniel), 1919. An older book, but one still widely used (it was reprinted as recently as 1918), is Brewer's *Art of Versification*, which includes a Rhyming Dictionary. I may mention also *The Writing and Reading of Verse*, by C. E. Andrews (N.Y.: Appleton); *The Art of Writing Verse*, by Editha Jenkinson (Erskine Macdonald), 1919; and *Verse Writing*, by W. H. Carruth (Macmillan Co.), 1917.



to appreciate it. And in almost any exercise in composition such training can be given. Particularly valuable, it seems to me, are exercises in the expression of ideas and the description of things through imagery—the very warp and woof of poetry.<sup>1</sup>

It is to be hoped that sooner or later a boy will be led to read the poets for himself apart from his school tasks. He will be fortunate indeed if at his entering into that land of enchantment he can find a guide to whom it is familiar and beloved, a guide whose influence will be directive, not restrictive, who will point out each well-loved scene, yet will not stay the adventurer's steps from wandering into new paths. In default of such living and personal guidance, the explorer may have recourse to such guidance as is given by makers of anthologies, cullers of the cream of literature. They may at least save him much wandering in arid and uncongenial wastes of literature. I shall therefore set down in an Appendix the titles of some anthologies.

One thing must at the outset be deeply impressed on the young reader of poetry. I have hinted at it already. It is this, that poetry will not yield its delight or its secrets to the casual, the hurried, or the flippant reader. One may 'skim' through a poem as through some light novel, but the time so spent is merely squandered. Nay, it is truly ill-spent, since it has contributed to kill the taste for what could be a high joy of life. No, if one would gain from poetry what it can give, one must strive to read in the poetic mood, the tranquil mood of imaginative and emotional realization, which is the poet's own.

<sup>1</sup> For methods by which this may be done I once more refer the reader to Mr Lamborn's invaluable little book.

At what age, or at what stage of literary development, books on æsthetic and literary theory may begin to be a help I do not pretend to determine.<sup>1</sup> Possibly not till the university is reached. At all events I shall here recommend two books with which one might very well begin. The first, Mr E. Greening Lamborn's somewhat unfortunately named *The Rudiments of Criticism*,<sup>2</sup> ought, I think, to be read by any and every teacher of poetry, so admirably does it fulfil its purpose, which is to be "a simply-written introduction to the study of poetry such as might be put into the hands of young students to show them what to look for." It is not merely simply written : it is written with such enthusiasm for poetry, such feeling for all its finest qualities—yet without gush—as might well draw one to the love of poetry. There are chapters on What is Poetry? (the least helpful, I think), Rhythm and Rime, Poetry is Music, Sound and Sense, Stanza Form, Pictures in Poetry, The Figures of Speech, Other Artifices and Other Arts, Poetry is Formal Beauty, Children's Exercises. One might disagree with some of its theories as incomplete rather than false :<sup>3</sup> but, given its special purpose, it is worthy of high praise.

The other book is Professor Laurie Magnus's *Introduction to Poetry*,<sup>4</sup> the aim of which is to convey the elements of taste and judgment in poetry by the natural or direct method of literature-teaching ; in other words, to stimulate a reasonable pleasure in poetry. It is charmingly written, but not quite so simply as the book

<sup>1</sup> Some suggestions in answer to this question are given in a subsequent section, under the heading "Systematic Study of a Poem."

<sup>2</sup> Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917.

<sup>3</sup> As I have had occasion to do elsewhere in the present book.

<sup>4</sup> Murray, 1902.

just mentioned, and it is, I should think, a little hard to read because of its piecemeal arrangement. With this slight reservation I can recommend it as an admirable introduction to poetry.

When one launches into the more advanced study of poetry the literature of the subject is so vast that the student runs continual risk of reading mainly *about* the poets instead of reading the poets themselves, forgetful of the truth that such readings can be of very little value for him unless he has already read much poetry and, to a large extent, formed his own views and become aware of his own tastes.

This little book is written in the hope of helping its readers to read and to appreciate poetry itself: there are many other books that will tell them what to read *about* poetry. Works coming under the latter head it does not fall within my present purpose to indicate further than has already been done in the text and in footnotes.<sup>1</sup> To these I refer the reader.

### 3. KNOWLEDGE FOR INTERPRETATION

Much of the knowledge required for the appreciative interpretation of the older poets or of the more difficult among the modern can only be gained gradually with the progress of one's general education. Classics, the physical sciences, history, geography, modern languages, modern literature—all these ought to contribute toward forming a general capacity for interpreting

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless I would also call special attention to Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch's delightful booklet on *Poetry* (Fellowship Books), 1914; to a solid and useful if not very inspiring *Introduction to Poetry* by F. M. Alden; and to a refreshingly original and unconventional book, *The Enjoyment of Poetry*, by Max Eastman, 1913.



literary works. Thus—to name some obvious examples—Gray's odes, Milton's *Lycidas* and *Comus*, Keats's *Hyperion*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, most of Matthew Arnold's poems, Tennyson's *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Ulysses*, *Ænone*, are only half intelligible without knowledge of classical literature.<sup>1</sup> Nor, for the lack of such knowledge, can editors' notes at all compensate. As regards geography and history the same may be said. How, for instance, is one to appreciate fully some of the finest passages in *Childe Harold* without any previous knowledge of Waterloo, Albuera, the Turkish régime in Greece, and without some acquaintance with at least the outlines of the geography of Europe? And, though Shakespeare's historical plays have a significance independent of time and place, still a knowledge of their historical background helps wonderfully to their appreciation. But, as the bearing of general education upon literary study is too wide a question to be dealt with adequately here, I shall confine myself to the suggestion of some special helps toward the study of literature from this point of view of the knowledge required. As I have already indicated, three chief points seem to demand preliminary study: (a) the writer's environment; (b) his personality; (c) his medium.

(a) *The Environment*.—Our first care should be accurately to 'place' the author. What is his period? Amid what social surroundings, in the midst of what historical happenings was his life passed? Shakespeare lived amid a ferment of new ideas, with a spirit of high

<sup>1</sup> To one who has not made a special study of the subject Professor Churton Collins's *Greek Influences on English Poetry* is something of a revelation.



emprise abroad in the air, in the "spacious days of great Elizabeth," Milton was Latin Secretary to the Government of the Commonwealth, Bunyan was a Puritan pedlar who spent half his life in gaol for his opinions, Wordsworth a recluse who passed his quiet days alone with Nature in the beautiful English lake country, while Europe seethed with war and revolution. The knowledge of such facts throws for us a new light on the author's writings. For, though it be true, as I believe it to be, that no great poet ever owed any essential part of his genius to his age, yet a man's mind as regards its less personal constituents—a writer's mind more than another's—must needs in some degree be moulded by his times. If we have made some study of the poet's times, in their broad outlines, we shall come to see, for instance, in Milton's poems the Reformation and the Renaissance struggling for the poet's soul. We shall see the cloud of Reaction rolling back across the momentary star of Revolutionary hope in

'Tis gone and for ever, the light we saw breaking  
Like heaven's first dawn o'er the sleep of the dead.

That is the voice of revolutionary disillusionment speaking by the lips of Moore. Our understanding of much that is in—say—*Locksley Hall*, *In Memoriam*, and *Aurora Leigh* will be in proportion to our knowledge of Victorian England in all its varied activities and aspirations. "We must, then, reconstruct for ourselves a bygone age in its ideas as well as its actions, and we must appreciate how the poet was affected by them, and the standpoint from which he must view them—we must be able to distinguish between the conventional spirit of the age [the *Zeitgeist*] and the spirit of the poet

who for all the originality of his genius is yet a creature of his time." <sup>1</sup>

If all poems that we care to read were edited with explanatory notes, such study might not be so necessary, but only a small proportion of what is worth reading has been edited in this way, and the chances are that even that proportion may not be within our reach. What better help, then, could there be than a series of monographs setting before us authors in their appropriate historical and social environment? And such series are available. As a specimen I may mention one series which carries out this idea on the whole satisfactorily, viz., "Epochs of English Literature," by J. C. Stobart. It is in nine little volumes, each bearing the name of some central figure of the period. Thus there is *The Chaucer Epoch*, *The Milton Epoch*, *The Tennyson Epoch*, and so on. In each case an introduction deals first with the epoch in general and its characteristics, then with the leading literary figures in the epoch. This is followed by characteristic specimens from its chief writers, while at the end are a series of helpful notes. The little books would meet the needs of college boys in senior classes, and they would set maturer readers on the track of fuller study. There is another series, "Handbooks of English Literature," with titles *The Age of Milton*, *The Age of Tennyson*. But, as the general title implies, it aims rather at a thorough study of English literature in general than at helping one to understand the works of any given author.

(b) *Personality*, that is, roughly speaking, the character and mentality of the poet. Something of the writer

<sup>1</sup> E. de Sélincourt, *The Study of Poetry*.

himself we must know if we are fully to appreciate his work. We must get at the *man* behind the book. Personality, whether or not we detect its presence, permeates all genuine literature. All genuine poets, in particular, have obeyed that command, "Look in thy heart and write." Shakespeare has been called impersonal, but he is so only in the sense of not expressly introducing, except in his sonnets, actual scenes or emotions of his personal experience. His method is objective, not self-conscious. But absence of self-consciousness is not impersonality. True, drama and pure narrative are, of their nature, in a sense impersonal. But not even from *these* literary forms can a writer who is not a mere echo or a mere plagiarist wholly exclude the influence of his personality.

I am not unmindful that this knowledge of the poet's personality, drawn from sources outside his poetry, is somewhat less needed and somewhat less helpful for the interpretation of some poets' work than it is for the work of others. Broadly speaking, poets belong to one or other of two types—Browning in his wonderful essay on Shelley has worked out the distinction between them. There are, on the one hand, the poets who, seeking to fathom the deep things of human nature, to scrutinize and probe its emotions, passions, aspirations, look first into their own minds and hearts. The poetry of such a one, if sincere, will be "less a work"—a thing consciously wrought and fashioned—"than an effluence. That effluence cannot easily be considered in abstraction from the poet's personality—being indeed the very radiance and aroma of his personality, projected from it but not separated. Therefore, in our approach to the poet, we necessarily approach the



personality of the poet ; in apprehending it, we apprehend him, and certainly we cannot love it without loving him. But for love's and for understanding's sake we desire to know him, and as readers of his poetry must be readers of his biography also." On the other hand, there are the poets "whose endeavour has been to reproduce things external (whether the phenomena of the scenic universe or the manifested action of the human heart and brain) with an immediate reference in every case to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow-men assumed capable of receiving and profiting by this reproduction." His poet's eye, piercing the veil that familiarity and the pursuit of practical ends have woven between us and nature or man, sees in clearer light, sees deeper, and sees more truly than the average man. The mission of his poetry is to interpret to us what he has seen. Such poetry speaks for itself, as we say : "and the biography of the worker is no more necessary to an understanding or enjoyment of it than is a model or anatomy of some tropical tree to the right taste of the fruit we are familiar with on the market stall." But, as Browning hastens to add, though in a given poet one or other of these two tendencies of genius, one or other of these two kinds of poetic faculty, will almost certainly hold the upper hand, a poet in whom one wholly excludes the other is scarcely to be found. "Rarely," he says, "it happens that either is found so decidedly prominent and superior as to be pronounced comparatively pure." And so in practice a knowledge of any poet's personality will help us in the interpretation of his work.

Let us, then, before proceeding far with a poet's



work, learn what manner of man he was: learn that Gray was a scholar who scarcely strayed beyond the academic precincts of Oxford; that Byron was a profligate nobleman who, having disgraced his family and wronged his friends, wandered forth through Europe pouring out upon society his spleen and his contempt—how else should we realize that Childe Harold and Don Juan, the Giaour and Manfred were none other than George Gordon Lord Byron under various thin disguises? Again, we shall better understand their writings when we know Macaulay as a somewhat hide-bound Whig and Swift as a disgruntled Tory, Scott as a lowland landlord and Burns as a lowland peasant, Crashaw, Southwell, Dryden, Pope, Moore, Francis Thompson, Coventry Patmore, Aubrey de Vere, Lionel Johnson as Catholic exceptions in a Protestant literature. We might well set a higher value on the poetry of men like Lamartine and Tennyson and Wordsworth when from a study of their lives we have become aware of the lofty ideals they put before them and their faithfulness, on the whole, to those ideals. Knowing ‘poor Goldsmith’s’ pathetic story, we should have a new understanding of *The Deserted Village* and *The Man in Black*. On the other hand, if we would understand the sad mingling of evil with good in the poetry of Victor Hugo, we must read the poet’s life and, as we read, watch how light and darkness, *les rayons et les ombres*, long struggled for the possession of his soul, until an almost starless night finally descended upon it. Our deeper appreciation of Shelley’s poetry will surely depend upon whether we have, in the main, taken sides with Coventry Patmore (and all the appearances) against the moral value of his character,

or with Browning and Francis Thompson in its defence. And so of the rest.

How are we to make the poet's acquaintance? It is given to few readers of a poem to know its author in the flesh. We must therefore seek knowledge of his personality either in formal biographies or in stray records of those who in their day knew and conversed with him. Biographical sketches are commonly prefixed to editions of the poets, but they often fail of their ostensible purpose. They are either a set of bare facts giving nothing of the *man*, useful merely for reference, or a summary of the writer's personal views which, for lack of data whereby to check them, we must accept even as he gives them. A somewhat fuller biography, if leisure permits, is certainly preferable.

Such biographies, of all dimensions, exist in bewildering abundance. Our aim should be to select one that shall be a direct preparation for the poet's work and that is itself literature. Such were Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*—but there have been many poets since his day. A good modern series is the "English Men of Letters" series, and there are several other series of the kind. To one of these I should like to call special attention. It is called the "Poetry and Life" series,<sup>1</sup> its aim being to show the author's work in relation to his character and career. The life-story of the poet is interestingly told, "attention being specially directed to his personality as it expressed itself in his poetry, and to the influences and conditions which counted most as formative factors in the growth of his genius." Into his life-story a selection, as large as space will permit,

<sup>1</sup> Published by Messrs Harrap at a popular price, a separate volume being devoted to each poet. The series contains over thirty volumes.

of his representative poems is interwoven. This plan is a new departure and is deserving of every praise.

*Critical* studies of a poet and his works may be useful at a later stage, provided they do not keep one from the poems themselves. Such a writer as R. H. Hutton, at once penetrating and sane in his judgments, is a good guide.<sup>1</sup> Many such studies are by great writers and themselves deserve the name of literature—Carlyle on Burns, Matthew Arnold on Wordsworth,<sup>2</sup> Francis Thompson or Browning on Shelley, Thackeray on Goldsmith, Pater on Coleridge, Macaulay on Milton, R. L. Stevenson on Whitman, James Russell Lowell's *Essays on the English Poets*. Such critiques are worthy of study for their own sakes.

A standard work in which biographical and critical matter accompanies selections from all the principal poets is *The English Poets*,<sup>3</sup> edited by Mr Humphry Ward, in five large volumes, the fifth of which appeared in the summer of 1919. The critical matter is contributed by writers specially qualified for the task, the selections are well made, and the whole work a valuable possession for a library of English literature. There is also that household work, *Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature*, which, however, aims rather at giving specimens of all the writers who can pretend to the name of poet than at a selection of high literary quality.

<sup>1</sup> *The Makers of Modern English*, by W. J. Dawson, is a well-written, popular handbook to nineteenth-century poets. Stopford Brooke's *English Poets from Blake to Tennyson* is excellent. His *Essays on Poetry* have recently been reissued.

<sup>2</sup> And several other studies of poets in his *Essays in Criticism*, second series.

<sup>3</sup> Macmillan.



(c) The writer's *medium of expression* must in many cases be studied that we may, to begin with, at least understand his meaning, and then appreciate his diction and his versification. The need arises from the fact that words in process of time change their meaning or their sound, or even die outright. For Chaucer the thing is obvious, and it is almost so for Spenser and his deliberate archaisms.<sup>1</sup> But a great number of even Shakespeare's words are now used no longer, and a still larger number are now used in a sense he would not have understood. And as for sounds, many of the rimes even of Pope—three-quarters of a century nearer to us than Shakespeare—are for us not rimes at all, and many of his metres halt through the change that has come in accents.

Now I do not for a moment suggest for the ordinary reader a systematic study of the language of Shakespeare, much less of that of Chaucer. I shall confine myself to dwelling on two small points. The first is that one ought not to resign oneself to misunderstanding. To do so is but too easy, especially in the case of words whose form has remained the same but whose meaning has changed. Examples may be found in almost any passage of Shakespeare; *e.g.* this from *Julius Cæsar*:

The abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins  
Remorse from power. (Act II., Sc. i., line 19.)

Not to know that 'remorse' here means pity is to miss the whole meaning. And lower down in the same speech:

But 'tis a common *proof*,  
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder.

So Cæsar may;  
Then, lest he may, *prevent*.

<sup>1</sup> And for poems in dialect such as Burns' or Barnes'. There is scarcely any good Anglo-Irish poetry in dialect.



'Proof' here meaning experience and 'prevent' forestall or anticipate. By way of meeting this difficulty, a practical if rather obvious suggestion—my second point—is to use editions which give the modern meaning *on the same page*, whether as a footnote or, still better, in the margin. To be obliged constantly to turn to the end of the book ruins the interest of one's reading, and most people will not do it. There is, for instance, a series of editions of Shakespeare's plays in which the modern equivalent is given in the margin. This is the Oxford and Cambridge edition, published by Geo. Gill and Sons. Chaucer has been edited in a similar manner. And many editors give, what is the next best thing, explanations at the foot of the page.

There are, needless to say, other things that one may study in a poem, or rather in connexion with it. But they concern, not so much the appreciative interpretation as the technical criticism of it. We then approach it from a different angle, from the angle of science rather than the angle of literature. It may, for instance, interest us to account for it as a result of discoverable causes, to inquire into its origins and into the influences that made it what it is. In short, we may want to get behind the scenes: to change the metaphor, we may desire to peep into the author's workshop. We shall find Shakespeare weaving his mighty dramas out of shreds from Holinshed's musty chronicles, borrowing from some translation of the classics, plagiarizing from some half-forgotten playwright. Or we may study how such and such a writer achieves his effects, lay bare Macaulay's tricks of style, criticize Matthew Arnold's faulty versification, or Browning's lapses from poetic diction. Such studies—the study of sources, the study

of technique, and the rest—have their use, but it is not with these that we are here concerned. We are learning to love flowers, we are not studying botany.

And let me repeat, even such studies as concern the appreciation of poetry are not, after all, quite indispensable in many cases. For some at least of the delight and profit to be gained from poetry may be gained from reading it, as one would read a novel, without any more preparation than a general education affords. Thus much for the consolation of those whose education is a thing of the past and to whom the daily concerns of life leave but little time for reading.

In conclusion, a possible objection may be forestalled, an objection which involves a point of no small importance. It may be said, your system seems needlessly elaborate. Why not take up a history of English literature, search out your poet, and study him in its pages? Certainly one may do that, but it is not always a satisfactory proceeding. Viewed from our present standpoint many histories of English literature suffer from various drawbacks—and one may not have a great number to choose from. Some are critical, and we are seeking not criticism but mere knowledge. Others are a plethoric collection of facts—titles, dates, irrelevant personal details, whereas we are seeking light upon the author's *work*.<sup>1</sup> Others again—and here is our important point—are so intent on classifications and groupings, tendencies and movements, so obsessed with 'isms' of

<sup>1</sup> It must be said, however, that much has been done of late years to meet the need here indicated. Besides critical and biographical histories of literature, we have histories which aim at showing us the setting of an author's works, the historical and social background, the atmosphere of his day. Professor Laurie Magnus's book, *How to Read English Literature*, seems to me to go far in this direction.

all kinds, that they have but little attention to spare for the individual poet and his work. Against such pre-occupations Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch<sup>1</sup> has lately uttered a needed and timely word of warning which may well be echoed here. We have of late years had dinned into our ears in certain quarters endless patter of theorizers about 'tendencies,' 'influences,' 'revivals,' and 'revolts' in literature: numberless abstractions in 'ism' have been thrust between us and the simple personality of the great writers<sup>2</sup>—Coleridge's romantic supernaturalism, Shelley's atheistic spiritualism, naturalism and romanticism, humanism and realism, and all the 'loads of learned lumber' with which the unhappy literary novice is made to cram his brain, that he may therewithal in days to come cover the nakedness of his ignorance. Not but what such classifications are at times convenient, as classifications generally are in the more exact sciences. Nay, they may very well answer to certain realities in the world of literature, as when, for instance, a group of authors has voluntarily chosen to write in the convention of a school. Thus in French literature there was the Pléiade, the Parnassian School, the Symbolists, the 'Unanimistes,' and so forth. But, as Arthur Symons well observes, when we speak of the Romantic Movement we must not conceive of it as of, say, the Tractarian Movement. In the latter movement two or three men of commanding genius and personality drew around them disciples and imbued these with their ideas, and then through the press these ideas filtered

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Literature* (Cambridge: University Press), 1918.

<sup>2</sup> With all respect for his genius as a critic, it may be said that Ferdinand Brunetière carries this tendency to great lengths. His literary history is not a succession of literary portraits, but a study of movements, influences, schools, evolutions.



into a certain section of the general public. No such thing ever happened in the creation of Literature. The so-called Romantic Movement was "a reawakening of the imagination to the beauty and strangeness in natural things, and in all the impulses of the mind and senses." It was a revolt against unimaginative conventionality; but each poet revolted in his own way and along his own lines. Therefore if, as I have suggested, we are to study an author's environment, his historical setting, it must not be with a view to labelling him with an ism or merging him in a movement—fancying that we have thus accounted for his work. "Tendencies," says Sir Arthur, "did not write the *Canterbury Tales*; Geoffrey Chaucer wrote them. 'Influences' did not make the *Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser made it."<sup>1</sup> Let us leave to professional men of letters all such abstractions. Let us, remembering that genius, and for that matter every genuine personality, is an exception, put on one side theories of the evolution of genius, the creation of the poet's mind by the *Weltsmerz*, the *milieu*, prevailing modes, or movements. Let us study our poet and his poetry in their individual, concrete reality.

Of books intended for the more advanced and more exhaustive study of particular poets there is now a great abundance. Whole literatures have sprung up around the works and the personalities of every great poet.

<sup>1</sup> "No great poet ever owed any essential part of his genius to his age; at the most he may have owed to his age the opportunity of an easy achievement." (Arthur Symons, *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*, 1909, introd., where this idea is fully developed.) "The French Revolution," he says elsewhere, "did not create the poetry which gave it expression or moralized over it."



Besides literary studies, innumerable 'guides' and introductions<sup>1</sup> to their works have been written; anthologies, bibliographies, dictionaries, concordances<sup>2</sup> of their writings have been compiled. To give lists of such works does not come within the scope of a book such as the present and would not be very useful to those for whom it is specially intended.

#### 4. THE SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF A POEM ✓

It may be useful to set down under the above heading in a somewhat more concrete and compendious way what I have said of the study of poetry in general.<sup>3</sup> Poems have constantly to be studied, during the course of one's education, in an intensive manner. How may one best set about such a study? Having often myself experienced the want of systematic guidance in the matter, I offer these suggestions to others who may have had the like experience.

And let not the reader's mind be perturbed by the word systematic. Let me say it at once—it is possible

<sup>1</sup> For instance, 'Introductions' to Browning by Bancroft Cooke and by Arthur Symonds and by Hiram Corson; 'Primers' of Wordsworth by Laurie Magnus, of Burns by W. T. M'Gown, of Shakespeare by Professor Dowden, of Tennyson by W. Macneile Dixon, of Browning by Edward Berdoo and by E. P. Defries.

<sup>2</sup> Such as Lockwood's *Lexicon to the Poetical Works of Milton*, Berdoo's *Browning Cyclopaedia*, Baker's *Tennyson Concordance*, Cowden Clarke's *Concordance to Shakespeare*, Ellis's *Shelley Concordance*, Lane Cooper's *Concordance to Wordsworth*, and a *Concordance to Keats*, published by the Carnegie Institute, *A Handbook to the Works of Browning* by Mrs S. Orr, *A Handbook to the Poetry of Rudyard Kipling* by Ralph Durand, *A Handbook to the Works of Tennyson* by Morton Luce.

<sup>3</sup> I do not, however, again refer to that study of the *author* which, as I have endeavoured to show, is often needful for the full understanding and appreciation of the poem.

to be too systematic, to apply a rigid method in one's study or in one's teaching and ruthlessly to stretch every poem, regardless of its special nature, on the same procrustean bed: it is possible to insist too much on trimming and pruning one's vagrant fancies into some stiff and formal shape: it is possible to 'peep and botanize,' to take the flower to pieces instead of gazing at it with the frank pleasure and wonder of children. Science has its rightful sphere, but here we are dealing with an art, or rather with the appreciation of the products of an art. If, then, I speak of system, it is not with a view to turning literary study into a branch of scientific study, but because ordered and rational method in the study of it is a help to the appreciation of any artistic product.

Let us suppose that a poem is being taught to a class of boys or girls. The method, *mutatis mutandis*, may be applied when one is studying a poem for oneself.

First, then, I hold strongly that the entire poem (or in the case of longer poems a passage complete in itself) ought to be read aloud, practically without comment.<sup>1</sup> But it ought to be read by one who knows how to give their full value to its musical qualities and who is capable of at least suggesting by the voice its emotional qualities. The poem ought not to be read as a piece of prose: the rhythm ought, without violence to the sense, to be clearly marked.

This done, and while the poem *as a whole* is still fresh in the hearers' minds, its central theme or main idea—the soul of it,<sup>2</sup> so to speak—might be suggested, if

<sup>1</sup> In *Five Centuries of English Poetry*, by the Rev. George O'Neill, S.J., M.A., Professor of English in the National University of Ireland, there are some good suggestions on the reading aloud of verse.

<sup>2</sup> Or, as it has been called, not inaptly, its *generating principle*.

possible by one of the listeners.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the question: What is it about? should be answered as concisely as possible. The answer will not always easily suggest itself. It may come wrapped in many words, in vague and formless phrases. It will be an excellent exercise for each to embody the suggested answer in a formula as pithy and concise as he can make it. The theme of Milton's *When the Assault was Intended to the City* might be set down thus: "Milton, fearing that the Royalists may enter London, begs them to spare his house."

Our next endeavour must be to *understand* the whole of the poem, at least so far as such understanding is necessary for full appreciation. And first, as regards the *literal meaning*, three classes of things may need explanation, viz.:

- (a) *unfamiliar words* ;
- (b) *obscure constructions* ;
- (c) *allusions*.

But I suggest that only such explanations should be given as are essential for understanding the general significance of the poem. Further explanations are but a distraction, unless we are merely using the poem as a gravel pit for the extraction of grammar, philology, mythology, or whatever other fragments of various sciences may be discoverable in it. If our aim is knowledge and appreciation of a work of art, we must eschew needless erudition—there are editors who must needs track every word to its lair in the etymological dictionary.

<sup>1</sup> Otherwise we may miss the *unity* of the poem, without which it is a mere succession of beautiful words and images, not a work of art.



When all such needful explanations have been made, the author's *thought* may yet remain obscure. The extent to which that obscurity may be elucidated will depend on the insight of the particular reader, and on what help he can obtain from more penetrating interpreters. There are enthusiastic disciples of Browning who claim that for them there is no obscurity, or almost none, in the master's writings.

Merely to understand the literal meaning of the poem is, however, not enough. We must endeavour to enter into its *spirit*, to gain an imaginative insight, to feel the poem as the poet felt it while he wrote it. For this we must see what the poem itself can tell us about

(a) *the circumstances* ;

(b) *the mood*.

(a) What were the circumstances that occasioned the poem and in what circumstances, real or imaginative, was it written? Thus Wordsworth's *Two Voices are there* was occasioned by Napoleon's interference with the Swiss Republic,<sup>1</sup> Shelley's *Adonais* by the death of Keats and the belief that that poet's death was largely due to the ferocity of his reviewers. Coleridge's *Frost at Midnight* gives us a picture of the poet burning the midnight oil while his baby son slumbers in the cradle near him. We have not read far in Arnold's *The Scholar Gipsy* before we discover that the time is August and the place a half-cut cornfield, within view of Oxford, where the poet lies reading "a volume of forgotten lore," like Poe in his *The Raven*. To read *Thyrsis* aright we must

<sup>1</sup> A notable portion of Wordsworth's poetry was inspired, directly or indirectly, by the political happenings of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period.



in spirit walk out from Oxford with the poet through scenes once familiar and now peopled by memories. In Gray's *Elegy* the poet is sitting at evening in the country churchyard, while in *The Deserted Village* Goldsmith, far away from the scene described, is calling up dim memories of long ago. One condition of imaginative sympathy with the poem is thus a clear realization of the setting, the *mise en scène*. Often the poem contains no clear suggestion of this, and here the editor may come to our aid.<sup>1</sup> One of the difficulties of many contemporary poems for the average reader is that there is no means of coming to know the circumstances which occasioned them and to a great extent made them what they are.

I would here call attention to a book which, for the study of at least the greater poems of English literature, may be found of considerable value. I refer to *English Literature Through the Ages*, by Amy Cruse.<sup>2</sup> Leaving aside all minor writers and their writings, it aims at telling the story of English literature through the stories of individual works.

(b) *The mood* is often a result of the circumstances, but may at times be guessed at when the circumstances are unknown. Every lyric poem is of its nature the outcome of an emotional mood. A soul without emotion feels no need to express itself lyrically, and if, notwithstanding, it proceeds to fashion some thought into lyric form, the result is almost necessarily a cold and lifeless thing. We must endeavour to enter into the

<sup>1</sup> Or the poet himself. Wordsworth, for instance, has, by means of short introductions, told us the exact circumstances in which each of his poems came to be composed.

<sup>2</sup> Harrap, 1919.

poet's mood. Sometimes he discloses it to us as does Shelley in the very title of his *Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples*. Sometimes the subject chosen implies it, as in an elegy or a lament—that is, if the mood be true to the theme. Often we must gather it from the poem itself. The poem will never be, like the memories of nature to Wordsworth,

Felt in the blood and felt along the heart,

unless at least to some extent we enter imaginatively into the poet's mood with sympathy, indignant with his indignation, tender with something of his tenderness, sorrowing in his sorrow, catching his infectious gaiety. What profit would there be in reading *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* with dull seriousness or *Evangeline* with stolid indifference? Such imaginative sympathy may seem to be at times difficult of attainment. It would not be easy, for instance, for an Englishman to enter with full sympathy into the spirit of, say, *Paul Revere's Ride* or *Dark Rosaleen*; for an Irishman to thrill with Campbell's *The Battle of the Baltic* or Macaulay's *The Armada*. It can be done, nevertheless, and that without abandoning any of one's convictions. But, for the nonce, one must lay aside the critical, and adopt the receptive, attitude. We must surrender ourselves to the poet's mood.

It may be useful to trace next how the poet works out the main idea (or emotion, as the case may be) of his poem, what arguments he insinuates, what impression he seeks to convey about this idea, and by what means he accomplishes his purpose. This is, in the main, a study in *structure*.

We can study, also, how, even apart from the main

idea, the mood may bind the whole poem into unity, informing, impregnating, as it were, word and phrase and image.

We have yet to study more particularly the poem's *æsthetic* qualities—the beauties of its thought or its emotion, its diction, its versification.

(a) *Thought or Emotion*.—In calling the attention of young learners to intellectual, imaginative, and emotional beauties a certain cautiousness of approach is to be desired. One must not rhapsodize or—to use a barbarous expression—enthuse. To do so is to defeat one's purpose, which is to make them see and appreciate beauty with their own individual minds. For they will either, in a spirit of faith and good-will, take for granted all we say and fancy that they are using their own minds, or they will mentally set down our enthusiastic comments as gush, 'slopping over,' or whatever may be the current equivalent in schoolboy or student parlance. Unfortunately no rules can be given for the practice of discretion and tact.

(b) On the other hand, felicities of *diction* can be pointed out with profit, and in more or less detail according to the capacity of the learners. One can show how the words chosen answer to the mood, as in Tennyson's

He is not here but far away ;  
The noise of life begins again,  
And ghastly through the drizzling rain  
On the bald street breaks the blank day.

One can point out how the images help to make the thought clearer or more vivid, or to give it emotional value : how certain words are chosen for their picturing power, as in such lines as :



By the margin, willow-veil'd,  
 Slide the heavy barges traile'd  
 By slow horses : and unhail'd  
 The shallop flitteth, silken-sail'd,  
 Skimming down to Camelot.

*The Lady of Shalott* is full of such picture-words.

(c) Under the heading of *versification* may be studied the *sound-values* of the poem, its musical qualities. One may point out how the metre chosen suits the subject and the mood. Good examples are Tennyson's *The Lotos-Eaters* and Gray's *Progress of Poesy*, where, within the same poem, the metre is varied to harmonize with variations in the theme. Next one might show how the sound in general is made to 'echo to the sense' or rather to chime with the poet's emotion by the use, conscious or unconscious, of such devices as alliteration, assonance in its larger sense and the rest, as has been already explained.

As for English metrics, I am convinced that the study of them has *for the average student* little or no value from a *literary* point of view. What educative value it may have as a scientific study in the same category with algebra or dynamics I leave to others to determine. It is hardly too much to say that the science of English metrics has not emerged from the melting-pot. Witness the recent controversies in the literary periodicals, notably *The Times Literary Supplement*, over the versification of Shakespeare, involving, as they did, the fundamental notions of metrics. Witness also the appearance of new systems of English prosody, each claiming to upset previously accepted views.<sup>1</sup> I am

<sup>1</sup> For example, *The Measures of the Poets : A New System of English Prosody*, by M. A. Bayfield (Cambridge University Press), 1919. See in *The Athenæum*, for December 6, 1919, Professor Saintsbury's article,



convinced that whatever gain may be derived from the study is more than counterbalanced by the all but certainty of bewildering and disgusting the learner.

To begin with, the mere mastering of the nomenclature and classification of metres is in itself a formidable task. But when the student has learned the meaning of spondee and anapæst, asclepiads and pyrrhics and amphibrachs, cæsure and anacrusis and syncopation, the acephalous iambic heptasyllable and the trochaic tetrameter catalectic,<sup>1</sup> he is not, I believe, much nearer to the meaning of poetry, and he is still but at the outset of his task. He has yet to apply to English verse this formidable scientific apparatus. And here his guides often fail him. One recent writer speaks of the "chaos of conflicting opinion that has enveloped the study of English prosody" and of "the deplorable lack of agreement among prosodists as to the very fundamentals of their science."<sup>2</sup> Another tells us that "no field of literary study has produced so many widely different theories and schools as that of versification. There are stress theories, syllabic theories, quantitative theories, 'long and short' theories, 'monopressure' theories, 'rhythm-wave' theories, time-part theories, historical

"A New Prosody," and in *The Times Literary Supplement* for November 20, 1919, p. 668, a review of the same book, in which the writer admits the difficulty of scanning (scientifically, no doubt) a line of English poetry. The writer under review, he remarks, "would have us upset all our established ideas of English metre, but that is a mild request to which students of prosody are inured." Mr Bayfield tells us, for instance, that no such foot as the iambus is to be recognized in English verse.

<sup>1</sup> Any book of prosody, such as Professor Bayfield's above referred to, or Professor J. B. Mayor's, fairly bristles with such terms.

<sup>2</sup> *The Foundations and Nature of Verse*, by Cary F. Jacob (Columbia University Press), 1918.

theories.”<sup>1</sup> Anyone with an ear for rhythm (and if he has not this ‘ear’ I doubt if prosody can bestow it) can read verse so as to feel and to bring out its cadences and its music. If an occasional verse of Shakespeare ‘will not scan,’ why try to fit it into some theory or spend time in discussing whether the fact be due to a misprint in some early edition or to a change in pronunciation? Such a discussion, I submit, is for editors and not for schoolboys. Let the editor make the line scan if he is able. If he fails, the schoolboy may well leave the matter there.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, by intelligent and skilful reading aloud young learners can be shown, without needless technicalities, the distribution and number of voice stresses or beats in a line, the variety secured by changing the position of these stresses from line to line, and how, by variations in the length of the lines and the position of their stresses, the stanza is built up.

I suggest that not until most of the work just sketched out has been gone through should the learner be asked to commit the poems to memory. The reason is twofold. In the first place, the task will have been rendered easy: nay, he will almost know the poem already. Secondly, he will now proceed to commit to memory, not a jumble of half-understood and almost wholly unappreciated phrases, but something he has learned to enjoy and which he may even be anxious to remember for its own sake. In the case of many pupils the imposition of long, unexplained, and, to the learner, dreary poems is little

<sup>1</sup> *The Reading and Writing of Verse*, by C. E. Andrews (N.Y.: Appleton), 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Yet examining bodies continue to exact of schoolboys and girls the ability to scan any passages they (the former) choose to pick out from a prescribed play of Shakespeare.

short of cruelty. It certainly does not lead to the love of poetry for its own sake.<sup>1</sup> It has been well said that in driving poetry into the head masters too often drive it out of the heart. And that is surely a disaster. Would it not be possible to get even schoolboys and schoolgirls gradually to fill some private note-book with their favourites and to come to know by heart the treasures therein garnered?

There remains a valuable and fruitful form of study, namely, the application, where it can be applied, of the comparative method. It is one of the best means of awakening the critical sense, by which I mean not the capacity of finding fault and the ability to depreciate, but the power to "separate the precious from the vile," to discriminate between what is true poetry—the worthy, imaginative expression of genuine emotion—and what is deficient in the qualities of true poetry, not "to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider." This method is also useful to awake a sense of style, of individuality in style.

The comparative method may be applied in any one or more of three ways:<sup>2</sup> (1) We may compare and contrast this poem with another lyric by the same writer but dealing with a different subject, *e.g.* Milton's *L'Allegro* with his *Il Penseroso*. Wordsworth lends

<sup>1</sup> But there is the public examination? Yes, that is the rub. But the programme of the examining body ought to state expressly that such knowledge 'by heart' will be expected only in the case of the most striking passages. To specify even more particularly ought not to be difficult.

<sup>2</sup> Here I am indebted to a useful little work, *The Study of English Literature*, by W. Macpherson (Cambridge University Press), 1908; new and enlarged edition, 1920.



himself greatly to this study: it is interesting and instructive to compare his thought at different stages of its development.

(2) We may compare and contrast this poem with a poem or even a prose passage on the same subject but by a different writer. For example, if we are studying Shelley's *Skylark* we might read the poems by Hogg and by Wordsworth and some description in prose of the habits of the skylark as seen by a naturalist. If we are studying Arnold's *Thyrsis* we may read and compare other great elegies—Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, Milton's *Lycidas*, Shelley's *Adonais*. Anthologies of elegies have been compiled, and, indeed, anthologies of almost every conceivable subject, and these are most useful for the comparative method. Of course, for more advanced students it will be stimulating and suggestive to compare the treatment of similar themes by poets in other tongues—a passage of *Paradise Lost* or of *Sohrab and Rustum* with a passage of Homer or of Virgil.

(3) In default of exact parallels we may take for purposes of comparison any lyric by a different author and note points of difference and of similarity.

The editor of *The Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics* has brought together, as far as the chronological plan of his anthology allowed, poems resembling one another in theme or in character. Many anthologies classify their contents according to subjects, and may therefore be useful for comparative studies of this kind.

I must call attention here to a little book that has recently appeared, entitled simply *Studies in Literature*.<sup>1</sup> It seems admirably adapted to the object of giving

<sup>1</sup> By F. H. Pritchard (Harrap), 1919.



both method and interest to the *intensive* study of pieces of literature. It leads to appreciation as well as to knowledge. There are thirty-two selections, some in verse, some in prose. Each is followed by a discussion which reads like an interesting causerie about the poem, but manages to convey much instruction and suggestion. Then there are 'Exercises' which give the pupil some excellent original work to do. Finally a list of poems and of prose passages is given for 'Comparative Reading.' Thus for 'Comparative Reading' following Dryden's *Song for St Cecilia's Day* the author suggests, among other pieces, Browning's *Abt Vogler*, Bridges' *Ode to Music*, Collins' *Ode on the Passions*, Tennyson's *The Poet's Song*, and two passages from Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup>

. . . . .

For purposes of comparison I here set down a summary of method as given in a French book <sup>2</sup> which came under my notice after I had concluded the preceding section. We begin, says the author, by bringing out the *general* features of the text to be studied. Thus :

1. We set forth all the historical explanations (*éclaircissements*) which aim at reconstructing around the text its true original atmosphere ("le replacer," as he says later on, "dans son milieu et à son moment"), and at giving it back its correct accent and sonority.

2. We read it aloud.

<sup>1</sup> For several points in this part of the book I am indebted to a lecture delivered before the English Association in November 1918 by Captain F. Boillot.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Explication Française*, par G. Rudler, ancien élève de l'École Normale Supérieure; Agrégé de l'Université; Professeur au Lycée de Caen (Paris: Colin). The points here summarized are fully worked out in the course of the book and then applied to particular examples.

3. We 'place' it in the work from which, if it be not a complete poem, it has been taken.

4. We ascertain or we analyse the general idea, the dominant feeling of the piece.

5. We work out its general rhythmic and melodic build.

6. We call attention to its literary qualities and its outstanding moral features.

7. If there remain to be given any explanations or items of information external to the poem and not considered essential under the first heading, they may be given here.

Of these points, continues the author, numbers 4, 5, and 6 are the most important. He then proceeds to explain and justify his plan, and then to give some suggestions for detailed study.

## 5. GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON THE TEACHING OF POETRY

One or two reflections may be added to the above suggestions. They are, to my way of thinking, of the utmost importance. The object of literary study, especially in the case of the young, is not the appreciation of literary craftsmanship, it is appreciation of the beauty, truth, and goodness of the work produced by the literary craftsman. Between those who pursue these two objects there is all the difference that exists between the man who at the play thinks only of the clever acting and the excellent make-up and the man who surrenders himself to the thing enacted and thrills with the emotion of real life. Moreover, all great literature is something even more than a work of art, it is a bodying forth of the soul of man, it is a reflection of life. As such it

must be accepted, and as such it must be taught, or it is not worth teaching. Too often it is degraded to the position of a sort of quarry whence the sand and gravel of grammatical examples, the fossils of philology, may be drawn when needed. It is at best a 'text,' to be mastered for examination purposes, to be dissected and scrutinized lest any possible source of examiners' questions on it should continue to lurk in it unnoticed. We take the flower to pieces lest there should be any part of it which we might fail to name if asked. This is not to condemn all literary analysis. It is the method and the purpose of the analysis that is impugned.

Looking at the matter in a somewhat different aspect, no art can fulfil its purpose in the individual case unless it be accepted with the æsthetic pleasure of those faculties to which it makes its appeal. That is almost a truism; but how often neglected in the teaching of poetry! "Literature was written for enjoyment. . . . Woe be to him who makes a hell of this earthly paradise, who plants the fair meadows of poesy with the thorn of grammar, the briar of etymology, and the prickly, unappetizing thistle of historical annotation, who mars the face of Beauty with the mask of learned triviality, so that the children come to think of her, their elder sister, as a harsh taskmistress. . . . Poetry is as the king's daughter, all-glorious within and her clothing of wrought gold; and if she be not brought with joy and gladness, let the door of the school be closed altogether against her. So at least, when the children come upon her one day outside, she will wear the face, not of an old enemy, but of a friend they have long been seeking." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. Dover Wilson, *Poetry and the Child*.

Alas ! this ideal is not always easy to realize, but not for that should we cease to aim at it.

This is, perhaps, the place to call the attention of those of my readers who are interested in the teaching of poetry to a society which has done and is doing much to make that teaching what it ought to be. The English Association<sup>1</sup> aims at promoting the study of English literature in general, but a large proportion of its lectures and pamphlets have been devoted to poetry in particular. Among its pamphlets are *The Uses of Poetry*, by A. C. Bradley ; *Poetry and the Child*, by J. Dover Wilson ; *The Study of Poetry*, by E. de Sélincourt ; *The Teaching of English in Schools* ; and many articles here and there in the five volumes of *Essays and Studies* that the Association has published.

<sup>1</sup> The Secretary resides at 2 Bloomsbury Square, London, W.C.1.



## EPILOGUE

### THE 'MISSION' OF POETRY

IT is a common experience that an object of study in which one has been long absorbed to the exclusion of all else tends to usurp in one's mind proportions that do not belong to it. Gradually it fills one's horizon, while the things that are not concerned with it dwindle to insignificance. It behoves one, then, under pain of growing into a faddist or a fanatic, to restore one's sense of proportion and to put back the object into its true perspective. That is the peril of the specializing student. The writer of a monograph—be the subject what it may—is in like peril. He has brought to bear upon his subject such powers as he possesses: he writes under the obsession of it. It were well, before sending forth his work, however conscientiously it may have been carried out—to stand back from it, so to speak, and survey it in relation to its surroundings. Then, if need be, he can readjust the proportions and restore the perspective.

Some such final survey would seem to be fitting at the close of even so modest a study as the present. Throughout it we have considered poetry in isolation, not only from other objects of thought with which it may have connexions, but from other branches of literature with which it is intimately bound up—fiction, the drama, oratory, the essay. And so to not a few

readers it may have seemed that the large claims here put forward for poetry may be due in part to a loss of perspective, and that in pleading for the high worth of poetry I have overreached myself, proved too much, and so ended by proving nothing.

Doubts such as these present themselves naturally even to one not ill-disposed toward poetry, and they merit discussion. But it would take us far beyond the scope of this little book to enter into an elaborate dissertation upon the place of poetry in the cosmos. It will be enough, perhaps, having glanced at some pleas for poetry that seem exaggerated, to point out the true value—the *practical* value, though in no narrow sense—that poetry may have in life, its ‘mission’ or ‘message.’

And first there is the oft-debated claim that art is independent of morality, nay, superior to it.<sup>1</sup> “Art is above morals,” says a writer typical of a not inconsiderable school of thought,<sup>2</sup> “because works of art are an immediate means to good. Once we have judged a thing a work of art, we have judged it ethically of the first importance, and put it beyond the reach of the moralist.”<sup>3</sup> To such a claim this may be conceded, that morality is not the immediate concern of art as such. The aim of art is not to make a good thing but to make a beautiful thing. It is true to say with

<sup>1</sup> I do not here enter upon the deeper aspects of a subject that cannot be discussed in a paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> Though scarcely of modern criticism as a whole.

<sup>3</sup> *Art*, by Clive Bell, third edition, 1916, p. 20. It is well to bear in mind that the author’s entire theory is concerned with the *visual* arts alone, and that for him the whole artistic value of these arts lies in ‘significant form.’ Pure representation of reality and any attempt to convey ideas are for him equally outside of the domain of art.

the same writer that "the only relevant qualities in a work of art, judged as art, are artistic qualities."<sup>1</sup> And when he has given the form of beauty to his work, the artist, as artist, has fulfilled his task. But besides being an artist he is also a man, with all the moral responsibilities of any common human being. Nay, his responsibility is the heavier just because he is an artist, and possesses the fearsome power of clothing moral evil in trappings of seductive beauty. No doubt there is much art, there may even be poetry, that is neither good nor evil, that is simply beautiful or the reverse. Such art can work evil only because of some spring of evil within the perceiver. But the moment that the artist makes his art the channel of a moral idea he is responsible under a higher law than the laws of art. That is but a truism for the believer in God. Nor can the artist wholly escape from ethics even within the domain of his own art. For may not the moral quality of a work of art claim rank as one of its artistic qualities, and that not the least important? "Pure Ethics," says the Poet Laureate—and can we say him nay?—"is man's moral beauty, and can no more be dissociated from Art than any other kind of beauty, and, being man's highest beauty, it has the very first claim to recognition."<sup>2</sup> And what is true of all art is, from all that we have said, true in a far fuller sense of poetry.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Same work, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Bridges, *The Necessity of Poetry*. And Matthew Arnold had said long ago, "A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against *life*; a poetry of indifference to moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards life."

<sup>3</sup> For a masterly discussion of the question I would refer the reader to G. Longhaye, *La Théorie des Belles-Lettres*.



Claims of a different kind are often to be met with in contemporary literature, claims so sweeping as to bring poetry into discredit with average men and women who, without being Philistines, are neither intellectuals nor 'æsthetics.' "We speak of Wordsworthians," says a recent writer, "as we speak of Franciscans and Lutherans and Wesleyans. To his followers Wordsworth is more than a poet; he is a spiritual leader, a master of life." The same might be said of certain disciples of Browning and of Whitman. And for art in general claims such as this are to be met with: "For those who can feel the significance of form, art can never be less than a religion. In art these find what other religious natures found and still find, I doubt not, in impassioned prayer and worship."<sup>1</sup> Or again, this time of poetry: "There are not a few educated men who find in the poets and in the poets alone the expression of their deepest convictions concerning the profoundest interests of life."<sup>2</sup> The great poets, indeed, though deeply convinced of the high seriousness of their art and of the significance of their message, have rarely lent themselves to such a cult. Nay, at times, in a mood of lowliness, a poet has deemed himself but "the idle singer of an empty day." True, we have a Victor Hugo proclaiming that "le poète n'est pas seulement un chancre divin, c'est avant tout un révélateur, et son rôle religieux domine son rôle littéraire." His poetry is full of claims yet more vast. Again, from the soaring eloquence of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* one

<sup>1</sup> *Art*, by Clive Bell. It is but just to add that for this writer religion is "an expression of the individual's sense of the emotional significance of the universe." Somewhat similar views are set forth in G. Santayana's *Poetry and Religion*.

<sup>2</sup> H. Jones, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher*.



might cull phrases that seem to embody pretensions no less lofty. But for the most part such pretensions are put forward by enthusiastic disciples who have made an idol of the master.

Now in what has been said in these pages about our debt to the poets a spiritualizing, even a religious, power of influence has not been denied them, nay, has been expressly claimed. But only such as are at a loss for a revealed religion could accept them as prophets, messengers from the unseen, inspired preachers of religious truth. Their moments of vision, of imaginative insight and emotional exaltation, are moments of inspiration in some true sense. But the believer will not take such inspiration, however splendid, for that divine co-operation which guarantees the truth of what is written under its guidance. Upon our path to the Hereafter there has shone a light such as we should have looked for in vain from poet, seer, or sage, a light from Above.

But enough of limitations and reserves. They belittle, indeed, in nowise the true message of poetry. Poetry will suffer no loss by leaving to religion—and likewise to science and to philosophy—the domains that are their own. It can glorify all of them without usurping to itself their rôles. By making such reservations, then, nothing is withdrawn of all that has been said in preceding pages about the greatness of the proper *rôle* of poetry. Let us take a final glance at this.

The things that give its real worth to life are spiritual qualities. Its ups and downs, its outward vicissitudes, the circumstances that make up its setting, are not the things that matter in the end. They are but

Machinery just meant  
 To give thy soul its bent,  
 Try thee and turn thee forth sufficiently impressed—

in so far of value and no farther. One's real life—the life of mind and heart—is inward. "Tout passe, tout lasse, tout casse." But one's inward life may go on untrammelled, in nowise at the mercy of the clash of petty interests and the importunity of petty occupations.

The mind is its own place, and it can make  
 A heaven of earth, a hell of heaven.<sup>1</sup>

And it is little better than a truism to say that the happiness or unhappiness of our existence, its value to us while it lasts, is measured by that inward life. Peace of spirit, the assurance of faith, joy and sadness, love and friendship, the inspiration of an ideal—out of these things, not out of outward happenings, are woven the tissue of our real lives.

We live by admiration, hope, and love,  
 And even as these are well and wisely fixed,  
 In dignity of being we ascend.

Now it is the high function of poetry, and indeed of all literature that is instinct with the poetic spirit, \*to minister to this inward life. For first it makes us in some sort sharers in the poet's mood, in the highest moments of these high souls. The poet is alive, as average men or not, to the wonder, mystery, and beauty in his own soul and in the world without. In his moments of realization and of vision that wonder, mystery, and beauty stir him to the depths, pierce him to the quick. Out of such moods comes his poetry. And, if the reader

<sup>1</sup> Though the body, says a great Greek poet, be a slave, yet may the soul be free. *Εἰ σῶμα δοῦλον ἀλλ' ὁ νοῦς ἐλευθέρως*. The thought was a commonplace among the ancients.

of it have a soul that is capable of such moods, it may be his privilege to live the poet's hour of rapture, to drink in his highest thoughts, to thrill with his deepest emotions. In such moods he may take refuge from 'eating cares' and seek rest of spirit from that weary 'getting and spending' which claims him day by day.

And besides the poet's moods there is the content of his poetry. No wide knowledge of poetry is needed to make us see that even when it seems to be singing of simple and familiar things it is in truth singing of an ideal world, fairer, better, more perfect than any that our eyes have looked upon. Often the poet's imagination soars wholly out of the drab world of everyday experience into worlds undreamt of by us average men. And thus the boundaries of our imagination are enlarged. In like manner may the poet—any writer, in fact, who sees the world with the eyes of a poet and knows how to tell us what he sees—deepen our powers of sympathy. That was Wordsworth's ideal. "You have given me praise," he wrote in 1800, "for having reflected faithfully in my poems the feelings of human nature. I would fain hope that I have done so. But a great poet ought to do more than this; he ought, to a certain degree, to rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane, pure, and permanent; in short, more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature and the great moving Spirit of things. He ought to travel before men occasionally as well as at their sides." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lowell says of Keats that he "had more of the penetrative and sympathetic imagination which belongs to the poet, of that imagination which identifies itself with the momentary object of its contemplation, than any man of these later days."



And yet, 'at our sides,' perhaps that is where we need the poet most. For his function is not only to reveal to us his fleeting glimpses of brighter worlds, it is to reveal to us the brightness of our own: it is to make us see our own commonplace, humdrum surroundings with new eyes, to see a glory in the familiar landscape that, but for him, we should never have guessed at,<sup>1</sup> to listen amid the din of the great city—"the great town's harsh, heart-wearying roar"—to the "still sad music of humanity." For the sky at dawn or at sundown can transfigure the commonest landscape with a light that turns all things to loveliness, so upon the commonest lives may come a light that in a moment transforms them into beauty. It is the poet that makes such moments immortal. He gives

To one brief moment caught from fleeting time  
The appropriate calm of blest eternity.

But perhaps there is more. Dare we claim for poetry that it may teach us a new attitude toward life as a whole, or at least toward a great part of our daily and hourly experience, an attitude that we may call the *poetic* outlook upon things, as contrasted with the *practical*. Men in general may be said to fall under either of two classes according as one or other way of regarding things holds in them the upper hand. The men of practical outlook are those who look upon all things as means to some ulterior end. They are ever hurrying onward with eyes fixed upon some goal not yet attained. They look neither to right nor to left, nor linger by the way to gaze on the wonder and beauty

<sup>1</sup> "The grand power of poetry," said Matthew Arnold, "is the power of dealing with things so as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them and of our relations with them."



and mystery of things, unless these too may be turned to account. And the aim itself when gained becomes but a means to further aims. When this attitude has fully mastered them, the sole good they see in things—yes and in men too—is their possible usefulness. They know nothing of the spirit of play, for their very pastimes are strictly means to health or to reputation or to gain. So intent are they on earning what they call their living that they give no thought to what to do with living when they have earned it. And so what boots them all their striving?

*Quo mihi fortunam si non conceditur uti?*

Such people may talk of happiness in store: but the hour that might be an hour of happiness comes to them unawares and is sped before they have awakened to its presence.

Now, leaving out of count for the moment our interests eternal—an end never to be lost sight of—such an outlook upon life, if exclusive, can scarcely be said to make for happiness. And I think the poets may well claim a title to our gratitude if they teach us to see life with something of their own vision, to see it in the mood of realization. To see it thus is first to see and feel the qualities of things as they are in their own simple reality—even though afterward the mind come to see in them symbols of higher truth. It is to taste the flavour of their being rather than to learn about them with a view to future use. It is to look on nature and man as beings full of wonder and mystery, and, it may be, beauty, not as instruments to serve our ends. It is to be intensely interested in life just because we are disinterested, to be content to gaze our fill upon the

passing banks of our river, instead of ever thinking solely of our destination. Such an attitude does not destroy the practical life : it but renders that life worth living.<sup>1</sup>

You will say, " But that is the attitude of the child, the child who enjoys the place of waiting while his elders fret irritably over some vehicle overdue, who delights in every incident and sight of a journey which to his parents is nothing but a wearisome, if unavoidable, means of reaching some destination." Yes, it is the attitude of the child : and it is the attitude of the poet just because the poet is one who has never wholly grown out of childhood nor has ever ceased to look at life with childhood's eyes. And I will dare to say that the best of life escapes unheeded from one who has kept nothing of his childhood. And if the best of life, which is its poetic side, escapes him, so one might well expect that poetry itself should almost wholly escape him. If poetry is to deliver its true message to a man, something must surely remain to him of the spirit of childhood<sup>2</sup>—its clear vision of things as they are, its wonderment, its frank acceptance of joy, its simple faith in goodness and love, with nothing of worldliness, nor disillusionment, nor cynicism—the poison of poetry. Without such a spirit he may have from poetry all the joy a

<sup>1</sup> This is not far from the attitude toward life expounded in that "Apology for Idlers" which, behind its mask of playful paradox, is one of the wisest of R. L. Stevenson's essays. But let me hasten to reassure the busy man. "It is possible to keep throughout a life not wholly disordered, or idle, or cast loose from the general drift of achievement, a spirit fresh to the world." (*The Enjoyment of Poetry*, by Max Eastman.)

<sup>2</sup> I believe this, and not its fanciful doctrine of pre-existence, to be the central truth of Wordsworth's glorious *Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*.

critic finds in a work that is faultless in technique. But that is not poetry's authentic message: its true message will be breathed only into the ears of a child. To would-be disciples it might say with something like a faint echo of sacred words, "Unless you become as one of these little ones, you shall not enter into the Realm of Poetry."





## APPENDICES

### A. SOME FURTHER DEFINITIONS OF POETRY

I SHALL set down here from the many descriptions or definitions of poetry which might be added to those already recorded a small number which seem to present features of special interest, but which, if set forth in the body of this book, would have unduly encumbered the discussion.

Professor R. G. Moulton, in his important work *The Modern Study of Literature* (1915), argues against the view that versification is included in the notion of poetry considered as a literary *genre*.<sup>1</sup> He divides all literature into two classes—literature that is creative and literature that is discussional. All creative literature is poetry. Consequently, “whereas the great bulk of ancient poetry is in verse, the great bulk of modern poetry is in prose” (p. 16), modern novels, for instance, being “in the fullest sense poetry,” for “fiction is simply the Latin counterpart to the Greek word poetry.” Various arguments are brought forward (at p. 233 and elsewhere) in support of this position. But the entire theory seems to be based on the notion, which I cannot but think mistaken, that the meaning of the word poet

<sup>1</sup> In discussing the nature of poetry I have recognized, as I think everybody must recognize, that there is a legitimate but wider use of the term whereby it is employed to describe the presence of the poetic spirit in art, architecture, music, life in general. It is with poetry as a form of literature that I deal in this book.

is to be sought in its Greek etymology, ποιητής, the meaning 'creator' being arbitrarily attributed to this Greek word, whereas it is equally well rendered in Latin by *auctor*, and in English by artisan, maker, doer of a thing. It is, moreover, hard to believe that the all but universal modern use of the word poetry can be so wholly perverse as this theory supposes it to be.

Mr Raymond Macdonald Alden, in his *Introduction to Poetry* (1909), gives the following as his definition of poetry: "Poetry is the art of representing human experiences, in so far as they are of lasting or universal interest, in metrical language, usually with chief reference to the emotions and by means of the imagination." This definition, which the author expounds in an ample and able manner, differs in little else but its wording from that set forth in the present work.

In Christopher North's *Noctes Ambrosianæ* (1858), p. 258, occurs the following interesting definition: "Poetry is the true exhibition in musical and metrical speech of the thoughts of humanity when coloured by its feelings, throughout the whole range of the physical, moral, intellectual, and spiritual regions of our being."

Leigh Hunt described poetry as follows: "Poetry, strictly and artistically so called—that is, considered not merely as poetic feeling which is more or less shared by all the world, but as the operation of that feeling such as we see it in the poet's book—is the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty, and power, embodying and illustrating its conceptions by imagination and fancy, and modulating its language on the principle of variety

in uniformity. Its means are whatever the universe contains, and its ends pleasure and exaltation." (Introductory essay to *Imagination and Fancy*.) That mention of the modulation of language on the principle of variety in unity would seem to imply metre.

Sir Henry Newbolt, in his *A New Study of English Poetry* (1917), would seem to be giving a definition when he writes: "Good poetry, poetry in the full sense of the word, is the masterly expression of rare, difficult, and complex states of consciousness, of intuitions in which the highest thought is fused with simple perception, until both together become a new emotion."

In his *The Working Principles of Rhetoric*, Professor Genung is content to establish this antithesis: That which *informs*, coming from the intellect and going to the intellect, is prose. That which *moves*, coming from the heart and going to the heart, is poetry. The music of prose is that which chimes with reason: the music of poetry is that which harmonizes with hope and fear, with love and aversion, with aspiration and awe.

I owe the substance of the following to a French friend. The theory set forth is based on a chapter, "De l'Art et du Beau!" in de Lamennais' *Esquisse d'une Philosophie*:

An accurate notion of what poetry is may be reached by starting from a vague and general notion and progressively narrowing it down. In its widest sense poetry is the alliance of immaterial beauty with sensible (*i.e.* sense-perceptible) form. Considered in material objects poetry in this wide sense would be practically equivalent to sensible beauty,

*i.e.* the beauty that is inherent in objects perceptible by the senses and that radiates from such objects. Thus we speak of the poetry that is in a fair landscape, in the mountains, in the sea. It is as much as to say that there is in these things a visible beauty which is a manifestation, striking above the common, of the immaterial beauty that is behind. The Universe is God's poetry, God's poem, and He is the supreme Poet. Clearly this is a very wide and general sense of the word, for, according to it, poet and artist are one; every artist is a poet after his fashion.

We reach a preciser sense when we say that poetry is the expression of the beautiful through the medium of speech. Poetry is thus set apart from other arts. It is no longer Art: it is an art. But there are other arts of speech—eloquence and prose—and these are rightly regarded as arts distinct from poetry.

Accordingly we seek a yet more precise description and seem to find it in the formula, "Poetry is the expression of the beautiful through symmetrically measured language." We may not, of course, wish to designate by the word poetry any *distinct and special form* of the expression of the beautiful through speech. But if we do wish to use the word in this preciser sense, the distinction between poetry and prose lies in measure, symmetrical and musical measure, or, perhaps more accurately, in musical symmetry. This is by no means to identify poetry and versification. In poetry precisely so called there are two elements—the essential substance (*le fond*) and the normal form, the soul and the body. The substance, the soul, is sensible beauty: the normal form, the body, is symmetrical speech, versification. There are verses without poetry: there is poetry outside of verse. But verse, musical speech, rigorously symmetrical or measured, is the final achievement, the final normal and natural form of the sensible expression of the beautiful.



In *Poetry and Fiction—the Meredithian Novel*, by Ernest A. Baker, M.A., D.Litt. (Sherratt and Hughes), 1909, reprinted from *The University Review*, February 1909, there are some excellent remarks which may be quoted here as confirmatory of certain views set forth in the course of this book, which was completed before the pamphlet came to the writer's notice.

Poetry is, indisputably, the fine art of words. Poetry is primarily a mode of verbal expression, and its characteristic is that it aims to convey all the pleasure of which words are capable. Such pleasure is of three kinds. There is that of the content of poetry, which must please by its objective beauty ; then there is the pleasure produced by the manner in which this content finds expression in words, that is the pleasure of style ; and finally, the charm of words for sense, that is, as a series of sounds, the pleasures of rhythm, assonance, and harmony. Emotion is a universal element ; it kindles the imagination that shapes the content ; it energizes the style ; and the music of words is both the natural effect of excitement and the means of awakening it.

Again, speaking of " the different ways in which discourse that is indubitably prose and discourse that is unquestionably poetry appeal to perception," he writes :

The intellect as imagination works on two planes. In reading history or science, the mind acting under the control of the will strives to realize to itself the things and relations described. Here the imagination is not free, but tributary to the understanding. Its own activity does not produce an immediate sense of pleasure, although that may arise out of the subject, or as a result of the difficulties overcome. Such is imagination at work on the lower plane, answering to prose. But when words are used as symbols, and by

their emotional accent and power of suggestion the reader's mind is instantly prompted to idealize the things evoked, and is filled with a distinct pleasure in so doing, then we have imagination at work on the higher plane. That is how the mind is affected by poetry. Prose is understood literally; but there is a transcendental meaning in the most concrete expressions of poetry.

I add here a list of some books which have appeared while the present work was passing through the press and of some others that are announced. They testify to a widespread interest in the question of the nature of poetry.

Professor Bliss Perry, of Harvard University, has written *A Study of Poetry* which is published by Messrs Houghton Mifflin.

In *Mythical Bards and the Life of William Wallace*, by Professor W. H. Schofield, of the same university, there is a chapter on "The Progress of Conceptions of Poesy."

*Lyric, Epic, and Allied Forms of Poetry*, by Charles Mills Gayley and Benjamin Putnam Kurtz (Ginn) is the second volume of a series, "Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism," by professors of the University of California. The first dealt with the fundamentals of æsthetic and literary theory.

Professor John Erskine, of another American university, Columbia, has just issued a similar work, *The Kinds of Poetry*. It is published by the Duffield Co., New York.

The nature and qualities of poetry are discussed by M. Edouard Dujardin in a recently published work bearing the curious title *De Stéphane Mallarmé au Prophète Ezéchiel*. (Paris: Mercure de France.)

*The Appreciation of Poetry*, by Eden and Cedar Paul, a little book of 59 pages, published by Daniel.

*Poetry and Religion*, by Israel Abrahams, with a foreword by Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, published by George Allen and Unwin.

The Oxford University Press announces a new edition of Aristotle's *Poetics*, under the title of *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, with an introduction by Professor Gilbert Murray.

Lastly, many interesting lectures have been delivered under the auspices of the English Association, notably those delivered in Liverpool by Mr Lascelles Abercrombie on "The Theory of Poetry," Professor Seth's lecture in Edinburgh on "Poetic and Philosophic Truth," Mr John Bailey's at Westminster on "Poetry and the Commonplace," since issued in pamphlet form, and a lecture entitled "Poetry and Meaning" delivered by Professor H. C. Notcutt before the South African branch. This last was, in the main, a criticism of the views on poetry taught by Mr E. Greening Lamborn and the school which he represents.

## B. ANTHOLOGIES

### COLLECTIONS AND SELECTIONS OF ENGLISH POETRY

#### I. GENERAL ANTHOLOGIES

FROM the following lists, which, of course, do not lay claim to be a bibliography in the scientific sense, the older collections have been for the most part omitted, on the principle that later anthologists have been able to draw upon the work of their predecessors and may be supposed to have included the best of that work. Some, no doubt, of the older collections, such as Goldsmith's *Beauties of English Poetry* (1776), Johnson's collection of the English poets in twenty-one volumes, Leigh Hunt's *Imagination and Fancy*,<sup>1</sup> and Thomas Campbell's *British Poets* (1844), have a certain value still, but it is a value that appeals rather to the student of English literature than to the average reader of poetry. I have included, as being specially well known and still available, a few anthologies dating from before 1900. With these exceptions, all those mentioned are of quite recent date. I have thought it well to give a rather wide selection, as many of these anthologies have various distinctive features and are intended for various classes of readers.

<sup>1</sup> "Selections from the English Poets illustrative of these first requisites of their art, with markings of best passages and an essay in answer to the question, What is Poetry?" 1845. Few early anthologies have had the good fortune to be reprinted in recent times. An exception is Robert Allot's *England's Parnassus*, 1600, reprinted in 1913 by the Clarendon Press.



I. ANTHOLOGIES FOR BEGINNERS

It will be useful, I think, to begin this list of general anthologies by a list of selections intended specially for the young. In the course of this book I have laid stress on the importance of not giving children at the outset a distaste for poetry. To put into their hands the collected works of any poet, or anthologies intended for maturer readers, would be to risk giving them such a distaste. Give them, on the other hand, a selection suited to their age and tastes, and little else, I think, will be needed to lay the foundations of a life-long love of poetry.

*English Poetry for Young Students.* Edited by T. W. Lyster, M.A., Librarian of the National Library of Ireland. (Dublin: Browne and Nolan.) 1893; 5th edition, 1904. In two divisions: I. Shorter or easier poems. II. Longer or more difficult poems. Very fully annotated and with scholarly introductions to each poem. Introduced to a wide circle of readers such poems as Ferguson's *Mesgedra* and *The Burial of King Cormac*.

*The Blue Poetry Book.* A selection made by Andrew Lang from the point of view of a child. (Longmans.) 1892. Some 240 poems, largely poems of action. Of this book Agnes Repplier, surely a discerning judge, wrote: "Never before has any selection of poems appealed so clearly and insistently to childish tastes and hearts. I feel as if the children of England must have brought their favourite songs to Andrew Lang, and prayed, each one, that his own darling might be admitted."

*English Poetry for the Young.* Selected and edited by S. E. Winbolt. (Blackie.) 1904. About 110 poems, mostly from the greater poets and chosen largely for their moral values.

*The Children's Treasury of English Song.* Selected and arranged by F. T. Palgrave. (Macmillan.) It is intended for children of from 9 to 16. It has passed through some two dozen editions and reprints since its first appearance in 1875. The name of the editor guarantees the excellence of the selection. "It is edited," says Agnes Repplier, "with such nice discrimination, such critical reserve, that it is well-nigh flawless—a triumph of delicacy and good taste."

*A First Poetry Book.* Compiled by M. A. Woods. (Macmillan.) 1886, with several editions since. Contains 128 poems, some of them by quite minor poets. Aims at being very simple and elementary.

*Poetry for Children.* The "Hundred Best" series. (Gowans and Gray.) 1906, etc. The poets included are nearly all of the first order: no contemporary writers are included.

*Ideal Book of Poetry for the Young.* Selected and annotated by Father J. A. Kingston, C.S.Sp. (Dublin: Fallon.) 1915. Intended for boys and girls of Irish secondary schools, and so contains a good many Anglo-Irish poems. Otherwise the selections are almost all from the greatest among the English poets.

*Realms of Melody.* By Geoffrey Callender. (Macmillan.) 1916. Admirable as regards selection and general get-up. Not encumbered with notes. Divided according to subjects into fourteen 'realms'—"England," "Romance," "Heroes," "Songs," "Odes," "Battle," "The Sea," "Parody," etc. Very great variety. Includes recent writers such as Kipling, Noyes, Gilbert, Newbolt, Bridges.

*Historical Ballad Poetry of Ireland.* Arranged and edited with notes by M. J. Brown. (Educational Co. of Ireland.) 1912. Poetry on Irish historical themes, arranged in chronological order.

*The Children's Poetry Book.* (Methuen.) 1919. Collected by Ruth M. Fletcher, Head-mistress, High School, Bath. "Adapted to the ages generally of 9-11."

*A Book of Ballads for Boys and Girls.* Selected by J. C. Smith and G. Soutar. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press.) 1913.

*Lyra Heroica.* Selected and edited by W. E. Henley. First published in 1891, it has since passed through upward of fifteen large editions. Very widely used in schools. The name of the compiler is a guarantee of the quality of his selections, which range from Drayton and Shakespeare to Kipling, Stevenson, and Bret Harte. Plenty of Byron, Scott, Macaulay. "To set forth, as only art can, the beauty and joy of living, the beauty and the blessedness of death, the glory of battle and adventure, the nobility of devotion—to a cause, an ideal, a passion even—the dignity of resistance, the sacred quality of patriotism, that is my ambition here."

*A Treasury of Verse.* For School and Home. Edited by M. G. Edgar. (Harrap.) 1907. It is issued in seven parts, the first of which is for quite young children. Part V consists of Ballads, Part VI of Elizabethan Lyrics, and Part VII of Scottish Verse. Parts II, III, and IV are also issued in one vol. (500 pages) under title *A Treasury of Verse for Boys and Girls*. Quite modern poets are laid under contribution—Gabriel Setoun, Norman Gale, Kipling, Noyes, Newbolt, Yeats, Canton, Austin Dobson, R. C. Lehmann, etc.

*The Poet's Realm.* An Anthology for Schools. Edited by H. B. Browne. (E. Arnold.) 1910. Arranged chronologically. A good and very varied selection, including old favourites, most of the great poets being represented. There are also some poems by recent writers—Alfred Noyes, Owen Seaman, A. C. Benson, Watson, Stevenson, Stopford Brooke.

*The Golden Staircase.* Edited by L. Chisholm. (Jack.) 1906–10. Issued in nine graded parts, the first part being for children of four, five, and six. And so on for the other parts. The place of honour is given to the great and well-known poets. There are also poems by Alma Tadema, Isaac Watts, Mary Howitt, A. P. Graves, Richard le Gallienne, F. Anstey,



R. Buchanan, F. W. Faber. The old favourites are not neglected.

*A Book of Verses for Children.* Edited by E. V. Lucas. (Chatto and Windus.) 1897. And *Another Book of Verses for Children.* 1907. Consist "not so much of poetry as of poetry for children." Arranged under headings—"Open Air," "Birds," "Christmas," "Dogs and Horses," etc.

*The Children's Garland, from the Best Poets.* Edited by Coventry Patmore. (Macmillan.) 1883, etc. Intended to introduce children to great poetry, to lead their minds to higher thoughts even if a little above them.

*The Cambridge Book of Poetry for Children.* Edited by Kenneth Grahame. (Cambridge University Press.) 1916. An easy introduction. Poems well within the grasp of children. Two divisions, viz.: "For the Very Little Ones," and "For Those a Little Older." Cheerful subjects.

*The Children's Poets.* Edited by Mary Macleod. (Wells Gardner.) Illustrated. Scott, Wordsworth, Jane and Ann Taylor, Longfellow—a separate volume (100 pages) for each. For quite young children.

## 2. ANTHOLOGIES FOR MATURER READERS

*Bell's Standard Elocutionist.* Widely known as "Bell's Speaker." Originally published in Dublin in the forties of the last century, it has enjoyed a wonderful popularity and is still in print, having reached its 253rd thousand! It has been to a certain extent recast at different times, but the present edition retains all the old features of—say—the 65th (1885) now before me. It has about 400 extracts, less than 100 of which are in prose. A favourite of many generations which deserves not to be forgotten.

*The Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics.* Edited by Francis Turner Palgrave. First published 1861, it has passed through numberless editions since then, including



elaborately annotated school editions,<sup>1</sup> and is still the most widely known and highly esteemed of all English anthologies. The editor's aim was "to include in it all the best original lyrical pieces and songs in our language, by writers not living—and none beside the best." The arrangement is neither strictly chronological nor according to subjects, but, beginning with the Elizabethans, we gradually reach Wordsworth and Shelley, an attempt being made to group poems of like inspiration. There are notes at the end. The original *Golden Treasury* is often printed with a hundred additional poems, bringing the total to 388, and including Tennyson, Browning, and Matthew Arnold. But in 1897 the original editor published *The Golden Treasury* (Second Series), bringing the selection, "as near as I can venture, to our own day."

*The New Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics.* Edited by Ernest Rhys. (Everyman's Library.) 1914. "A companion book to *The Golden Treasury*, ranging further back in time and further forward, and adding many poets who have enriched the lyric tongue, omitted in those pages." In six books (485 poems), Book VI "bringing down the lyric line to those writers of yesterday who, if fate had been kinder, might have still been writing—John Davidson, Lionel Johnson, and Francis Thompson among them."

*The Oxford Book of English Verse* (1250-1900). Edited by Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch. 1918. 1084 pages. The most important modern anthology. The poets are arranged in the order of their birth. The selection is not confined to any particular type or kind of poetry. Includes American and Anglo-Irish verse, but very little of the latter. No notes.

Ward's *English Poets* has been already referred to. It is much more than an anthology, as the works of each poet are preceded by an elaborate critical and biographical intro-

<sup>1</sup> *A Companion to the Golden Treasury*, by David Somervell, appeared in 1917.

duction by the foremost literary men. The fifth volume (published 1919) contains poems by Rupert Brooke. Vol. iv appeared about 1880, but there have been new editions since then.

*Five Centuries of English Poetry.* Edited by the Rev. Professor George O'Neill, S.J. (The Educational Co. of Ireland.) 1912. The arrangement is chronological. Every poem is carefully edited, everything being done to help toward the understanding and appreciation of it. The selections are most carefully made from the point of view of their literary quality. The volume is intended for students, and "aims at illustrating successive types of English poetry."

*The Flower of the Mind.* A choice among the best poems, made by Alice Meynell. 1897. "Gathered from the whole of English literature—the whole from Chaucer to Wordsworth—by a gatherer intent on nothing except the quality of poetry." All poems given complete. Strictly speaking the poems range from Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618) to Hartley Coleridge (1796–1849). Chronological order. Mrs Meynell is, of course, a poet and literary critic of the first rank.

*The Spirit of Man.* An anthology in English and French from the poets and philosophers, made by the Poet Laureate, Dr Robert Bridges, in 1915. Not so much an anthology as a 'commonplace book' of fragmentary extracts, 449 in all (as many in prose as in verse), from the author's reading, and chosen from the particular standpoint of the chooser's views on life in its deeper aspects.

*The Home Book of Verse.* Selected and arranged by Burton Egbert Stevenson. 1912. 3rd edition, 1918. Remarkable rather for bulk than quality. Contains 4010 pages, 3700 poems, many of them 'fugitive pieces,' by about 1100 authors, many of them distinctly minor poets, including living American and English poets of the younger generation. Classified by subject.

*An Anthology of English Verse.* Edited by Wyatt and Goggin. 1914. Introduction, biographical notices, glossary. The selection aims to be "representative of the best in English verse, exclusive of drama." About 300 poems, from Wyatt to Arthur O'Shaughnessy.

*The English Parnassus.* An Anthology of Longer Poems. Edited by W. M. Dixon and J. C. Grierson. (Oxford.) 1909. 767 pages. "The purpose is to afford teachers and students the opportunity for comparative study of poetry belonging to different periods and different types." About eighty poems, some of them extensive, such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. No poets more recent than Browning. All minor poets omitted except Sackville, Donne, and Marvell.

*England's Parnassus.* An Anthology of Anthologies. Edited by W. G. Horder, editor of *The Poet's Bible*, etc. 1906. 320 pages. From 1503 to Hood (died 1845). "No poem has been admitted unless it had the imprimatur of at least four of the eight editors whose collections have formed the basis of the present one" (preface). Chronological arrangement.

*The Modern Book of English Verse.* Edited by Richard Le Gallienne. 1920. Over 500 pages. Follows the lines of *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, but with special attention to modern poetry.

*English Poems.* Edited by W. C. Bronson, Professor of English Literature at Brown University. With illustrative and explanatory notes and bibliographies. Four volumes averaging 520 pages, dealing respectively with Old English and Middle English Periods, Elizabethan and Puritan Periods, Restoration and Eighteenth Century, Nineteenth Century.

*The Pageant of English Poetry.* Edited by R. M. Leonard, editor of many other anthologies. 1909. Contains more than 1100 poems by 300 authors, arranged in alphabetical order. Excludes work of living authors.

*A Paradise of English Poetry.* Edited by Canon H. C. Beeching. Various editions (1893-1907). Two volumes.



Contains no poems by living (1893) writers, nor any copyright poems, this so as to allow more space for earlier poems. Includes dramatic pieces, but not sonnets. Classified under headings — "Love," "Friendship," "Man," "Patriotism," "Religion," "Death," etc. Many selections from minor poets.

*The Temple of Beauty.* Edited by Alfred Noyes. 402 pages. 1910. "Arranged with a view to the elucidation of the great positive values which all great art contains." Nine sections with somewhat fanciful titles—"In the Beginning," "The Sweet o' the Year," etc.

*The Poets and Poetry of the Century.* Edited by Alfred H. Miles. (Hutchinson.) 1891-7. A standard work in ten volumes, giving very copious selections from the poets of the nineteenth century, minor poets being included along with the greater poets.

*The Flower of English Poetry.* Edited by Robinson Smith. (Routledge.) 1912. "An anthology of great verse." Chaucer to Matthew Arnold. Chronological arrangement. The poems are "chosen for their supreme literary excellence."

*The Poetical Compendium.* Edited by D. R. Broadbent. (Ouseley.) 1913. 224 pages. Three centuries of the best English verse. Chronologically arranged.

*The Hundred Best Poems (Lyrical) in the English Language.* Selected by Adam L. Gowans. (Gowans and Gray.) 1903. Second series, 1905.

*Stead's Poets Series.* This series of little fourpenny booklets (formerly published at 1d. or 2d.) deserves special mention here, as it has been the means of introducing innumerable readers to the best poetry in the English language. They place within reach of the masses Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Burns, Longfellow, Arnold, Moore, Whittier, Blake, Tennyson, Scott, Byron, Bryant, etc. They are published by Stead's Publishing House, Bank Buildings, Kingsway, London, W.C.2.



## II. SPECIAL ANTHOLOGIES

### I. PARTICULAR SUBJECTS

It may be said in general that there have been compiled anthologies dealing with almost every conceivable subject—Life, Love, Friendship, Flowers, Cats, Dogs, The Sea, The Seasons, Gardens, Children, Birds, and others innumerable. It would obviously be impossible to give here lists of such anthologies.

But as, in the course of this book, a special section has been devoted to the relations between poetry and religion, I think it will be of interest to mention here some of the principal collections of poetry dealing with religion.

#### *Religious Poetry*

*The Poet's Bible.* Selected and edited by W. Garrett Horder. (Isbister.) 1889. Two thick volumes, one for the Old Testament and one for the New. Consists of a collection of poems arranged according to the episodes in Bible history, and other subjects occurring in the sacred books. Most of the great poets are represented, and many minor poets also. Thus in the volume on the Old Testament, beside Milton, Chaucer, Dryden, Burns, Wordsworth, Longfellow, Scott, Browning, E. B. Browning, etc., you have Forsyth, Plumptre, Sandys, Craik, Morton, Lyte, and a host of others.

*The Treasury of Sacred Song.* Edited by Francis Turner Palgrave. (Oxford: Clarendon Press.) Many editions. Aims "to present poetry for poetry's sake," "to offer such lyrical sacred song, and such only, as shall be instinctively felt worthy the august name of Poetry." The great poets are well represented. Eleven Catholic poets find place.

*A Book of Sacred Verse.* Edited by W. A. Knight. 550 pages. (R.T.S.) 1910. "It is confined to what its author considers the noblest products of English and American

genius during the last four centuries," and includes "only those poems which its compiler believes to have reached a high level of insight and of beauty." It includes Newman, Faber, de Vere, Caswall, Ryder, Moore—not Crashaw nor Thompson.

*Lyra Apostolica.* New edition by the Rev. H. C. Beeching, with introduction by Canon H. Scott-Holland. (Methuen.) 1901. Originally published in 1836, it consists of 179 religious poems, about half of which are by Newman, the rest being by Keble, Hurrell Froude, J. W. Bowden, and Isaac Williams.

*Sacred Poems of the Nineteenth Century.* Edited by Kate A. Wright. 256 pages. (Harrap.) 1910. The collection includes poems by Austin Dobson, Edward Dowden, Richard Le Gallienne, Sir Gilbert Parker, and A. C. Benson.

*The Mystical Poets of the English Church.* By Percy H. Osmond. (S.P.C.K.) 1919. An anthology of religious poetry from the foundation of the Church of England to our own day, together with some pre-Reformation poetry, with valuable explanatory comment and biographical matter.

*Lyra Sacra.* A book of religious verse, selected and arranged by the Rev. H. C. Beeching. (Methuen.) 1903.

*A Book of Praise.* Edited by Sir Roundell Palmer (afterward Lord Selborne). (Macmillan.) "Golden Treasury" series. 1863, with more recent editions. A selection from the best English hymn-writers.

*Lyra Hieratica.* Poems on the Priesthood. An anthology edited by Father T. E. Bridgett, C.S.S.R. (Burns and Oates.) 1896.

*The Ways of God.* (Gowans and Gray.) 1907. One of the "Hundred Best" series. An excellent selection of poems by the great poets, dealing with the great mysteries of God and life and death.

*The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse (1300-1910).* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press.) 1916. Chosen by D. H. S.

Nicholson and A. H. E. Lee. With an introduction on mysticism. Includes translations from Gaelic, but none from Continental languages. There are selections from a considerable number of Catholic poets.

*The Treasury of American Sacred Song.* Edited by W. G. Horder. 1896.

*Prayers from the Poets.* Edited by Cecil Headlam and Laurie Magnus. (Routledge.) New edition, 1907. 371 pages. Arranged under headings such as "Veni Creator," "Pater Noster," "De Profundis," "The Conduct of Life," "Pilgrim's Progress," "Love and Death," etc. All the great English poets are represented. There are translations from Goethe, Sophocles, Ponce de Leon, Racine, etc.

*The Sacred Poets of the Century.* A volume in the series "Poets and Poetry of the Century," edited by A. H. Miles. (Hutchinson.) 1897. A large volume of 770+xxxii pages, drawn from many little-known writers.

*An Anthology of French Catholic Poetry*

*Anthologie de la Poésie Catholique de Villon jusqu'à nos jours,* publiée et annotée par Robert Valléry-Radot. (Paris: Georges Crès.) 1916. The editor is a distinguished writer and the selection is of high literary value. We cannot accord quite the same praise to *Les Poètes de la Foi au xix<sup>e</sup> siècle*, par l'Abbé Gamber (Paris: Retaux Bray), 1889, for, of the five poets whose works are studied and quoted, only one, Victor de Laprade, holds a recognized place in French literature. The book is nevertheless very interesting.

*Anthologies of Poems about the Blessed Virgin*

*Carmina Mariana.* Edited by Orby Shipley. Two volumes of over 400 pages each. 1st series, 1894; 2nd, 1902. Catholic.

*Regina Poetarum.* Our Lady's Anthology. Edited by Hon. Alison Stourton. 1907. Catholic.

*In Our Lady's Praise.* An anthology compiled by E. Hermitage Day. Foreword by Lord Halifax. (Pitman.) 1912. Most of the authors represented are non-Catholic.

*The Madonna of the Poets.* An anthology of poems in Our Lady's praise, edited by A. Bartle. (Burns and Oates.) 1906.

Individual authors have published collections of their own poems in Our Lady's praise. One of the best of these collections is Aubrey de Vere's *May Carols*. Another is Father M. Russell's *Madonna*. And there is the collection entitled *Mariale Novum*, by various members of the Society of Jesus.

### *Translations of Gaelic Religious Poetry*

*The Religious Songs of Connaught.* Edited in Irish and English by Douglas Hyde, LL.D.

*A Celtic Psalter.* By Alfred Perceval Graves. (S.P.C.K.) 1917. Translations from Irish, Scotch, Gaelic, and Welsh poetry "of a religious or serious character." A large proportion deal with early Irish saints or with monastic life. There are also prayers and laments.

*Carmina Gadelica.* By Dr Alexander Carmichael. A great collection of Gaelic prayers in verse, hymns, invocations, etc., from the Hebrides. Many of the pieces in Dr Sigerson's *Bards of the Gael and Gall* are religious, some of them very beautiful. So also are a considerable proportion of the poems in Miss Eleanor Hull's *Poem Book of the Gael*.

## 2. PARTICULAR KINDS OR TYPES OF POETRY

There exist many anthologies of sonnets, ballads, songs, elegies. Then again there are anthologies of humorous poetry, of historical and patriotic poetry, and of War poetry.



### 3. PARTICULAR PERIODS

There are anthologies of Elizabethan poetry, Jacobean, Restoration, seventeenth-century, Victorian, and so on. This is the place to give some references that may be useful to such as wish to study the poetry of our own day.

#### *Introductions to and Studies of Contemporary Poetry*

*New Voices.* An Introduction to Contemporary Poetry. By Marguerite Wilkinson. 1920. Discusses the technique of contemporary verse (Rhythm, Images, Symbols, Diction) and its spirit in connexion with Democracy, Love, Patriotism, Religion, Nature. Each chapter is followed by a number of poems given in full.

*Scepticisms.* Notes on Contemporary Poetry. By Conrad Aiken. (N.Y.) 1919.

*Studies of Contemporary Poets.* By Mary C. Sturgeon. Revised and enlarged edition. (Harrap.) 1920.

*The Advance of English Poetry in the Twentieth Century.* By W. L. Phelps. 1920. Discusses the foremost English and American poets of the day.

*An Anthology of Recent Poetry.* Edited by L. D'O. Walters. (Harrap.) 1920. Containing about sixty poems by poets of to-day. A cheap school edition is available, and in addition there is a sumptuous edition entitled *The Year's at the Spring*, illustrated in colour and black and white by Harry Clarke, with an introduction by Harold Monro.

*Poems of To-day.* Published by Sidgwick and Jackson for the English Association. 1915. Reprinted some ten times in two years. Contains selections from forty-seven authors. Biographical notes on these have been added to the 1920 edition.

*Lyric Masterpieces by Living Authors.* (Gowans and Gray.) 1908. Contains selections from twelve authors. Has passed through three editions and has been many times reprinted.

*The Malory Verse Book.* A Collection of Contemporary

Poetry for School and General Use. Compiled by Editha Jenkinson. (Erskine Macdonald.) 1919. All the poems included are from the publications of Messrs Erskine Macdonald. It is for the most part decidedly minor poetry. Sixty-three poets of the day are represented.

*A Miscellany of Poetry*, 1919. Edited by W. K. Seymour. (Cecil Palmer and Hayward.) 1919. An anthology of contemporary poetry, including such authors as G. K. Chesterton, W. H. Davies, Eden Phillpotts, Laurence Binyon, John Drinkwater, etc. The twenty-nine authors included seem to be somewhat arbitrarily chosen.

Then there are the collections of 'Georgian' (*i.e.* George the Fifthian) poetry, four series of which have been issued by the Poetry Bookshop, viz., 1911-12, 1913-15, 1916-17, 1918-19. Each of the first three has reached a sale of over ten thousand copies.

There are also series of more local or more temporary interest, such as the "Oxford Poetry Books," and innumerable anthologies of War poetry.

*The New Poetry*. An Anthology. Edited by Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson, editors of the magazine *Poetry*. (New York: The Macmillan Co.) 1917. Introduction stating the characteristics of the 'New Poetry' and the scope of this anthology. The latter contains no poems published before 1900. In its 380 pages 102 poets are represented—American, English, and Irish. W. B. Yeats, Alfred Noyes, Kipling, Synge, Bridges, Riley are omitted for reasons stated in the introduction. Valuable bibliography (pp. 386-404).

*Others*. An Anthology of the New Verse. (N.Y.: Albert A. Knopf.) 1916.

The June 1920 issue of *The Chapbook* is a bibliography of modern poetry compiled by "Recorder." It is "as far as possible a complete record of books of poetry published from January 1912 to the end of May 1920." With notes on some contemporary poets.

#### 4. PARTICULAR COUNTRIES

##### (a) The United States

America's best poets are represented in nearly all good anthologies of English poetry. Nevertheless many anthologies devoted exclusively to American poetry have been compiled. The following recent anthologies are given merely as specimens:

*American Poems.* Selected and edited with illustrative and explanatory notes and a bibliography by Walter C. Bronson. (Chicago.) 1919. Covers the whole period of American history, and aims "to show the individual representative work of each poet."

*Modern American Poetry.* Edited by Louis Untermeyer. (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe.) 1920. Described as a combined handbook, guide, and anthology, covering the period 1840-1918.

*Modern American Verse.* Compiled by Roma Claire. 200 pages. (Westall.) 1919.

*The Yale Book of American Verse.* Edited by T. R. Lounsbury. 570 pages. (New Haven, Conn.) 1912.

*The Little Book of Modern Verse.* A Selection from the Works of Contemporaneous American Poets. (Constable.) 1913.

*The Second Book of Modern Verse.* Edited by Jessie B. Rittenhouse. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin.) 1919. "Good American judges say that Miss Rittenhouse's two little selections are fairly representative of what is best in recent American verse." *The Times Literary Supplement*, which devotes to these selections its leading article of May 6, 1920.



## (b) The Dominions

*The Oxford Book of Australian Verse.* Chosen by Walter Murdoch. 302 pages. 1919.

*The Golden Treasury of Australian Verse.* Edited by B. Stevens. (Macmillan.) 1912.

*The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse.* Edited by W. Campbell. (Oxford.) 1913.

## (c) Scotland

Scotland has made a large and important contribution to poetry in the English language, yet Scottish verse is perhaps under-represented in anthologies, partly, no doubt, because so much of it is in dialect.

*The Edinburgh Book of Scottish Verse, 1300-1900.* Edited by W. Macneile Dixon. (Meiklejohn and Holden.) 1910. 938 pages. Contains no Gaelic and few translations from the Gaelic.

*The St Andrews Treasury of Scottish Verse.* Selected, arranged, and edited by Mrs Alexander Lawson and Professor Alexander Lawson. 300 pages. (Black.) 1920. Fifty-nine Scottish authors, ancient and modern, are represented. Glossary of dialect words.

*A Treasury of Scottish Verse.* Edited by H. A. Kellow. 111 pages. (Harrap.) 1912. Ranges from Barbour (fourteenth century) to the early nineteenth century. Glossary "designed almost entirely for the purposes of the teacher."

*The Book of Scottish Poetry.* Edited by Sir George Douglas. 928 pages. (Fisher Unwin.) 1911. Ranges from early Scottish poets to contemporary poets. Includes many ballads from Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* and much from Scott himself. Translations from the Gaelic not included. Much dialect.



*Scottish Vernacular Poetry from Barbour to Burns.* Edited by T. D. Robb. III pages. (Blackie.) 1912. Selected chiefly from Henryson, Dunbar, Barbour, Lyndsay, Montgomery, Allan Ramsay, Skinner, Mickle, Fergusson, Tannahill, Hogg, Burns (ten poems). Glossary.

*The Book of Highland Verse.* Edited by Dugald Mitchell. 408 pages. (Paisley : Alex. Gardner.) 1912. Introduction (51 pages). Part I: Translations from the Gaelic. Part II: English verse relating to the Highlands, including contemporary poems. Biographical notes on the Gaelic poets.

#### (d) Ireland

I cannot refrain from mentioning here, though they are not so much anthologies of poetry as collections of political and patriotic verse, *The Spirit of the Nation*, 1843, and *Ballad Poetry of Ireland*, edited by Gavan Duffy, 1843, for they are still reprinted, the former being in its sixtieth edition, the latter nearing its fiftieth. I have had occasion to publish elsewhere<sup>1</sup> a descriptive list of some fifty Irish anthologies, and shall here confine myself to a very small number. I do not include collections of verse translations from the Gaelic.

*A Book of Irish Verse.* Edited by W. B. Yeats. (Methuen.) 1895, 1900, etc. A selection of high literary quality, but distinctly personal in choice.

*A Treasury of Irish Poetry in the English Tongue.* Edited by Stopford Brooke and T. W. Rolleston. 600 pp. (Smith, Elder.) 1900, 1905. With all the critical and scholarly apparatus (biographies, etc.) of Ward's *English Poets*. A comprehensive and discriminating selection.

*A Golden Treasury of Irish Songs and Lyrics.* Edited

<sup>1</sup> *A Guide to Books on Ireland.* (Dublin : Hodges, Figgis and Co.) 1912.

by Charles Welsh. (N.Y.) 1906. Beautifully produced. Edited by a competent man of letters.

*The Dublin Book of Irish Verse.* Edited by John Cooke. (Frowde.) 1909. Contains 540 poems in chronological order. Modelled on *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. No biographical or introductory matter. Notes. Includes much verse of indifferent quality.

*New Songs.* Edited by George Russell ("A. E."). (Maunsell.) 1908, etc. The poetry of the new movement.

*Modern Anglo-Irish Verse.* An anthology selected from the works of living Irish poets by Padraic Gregory. 375 pages. (Nutt.) 1914. "This book contains no poem that does not reach a relatively high standard of excellence . . . but it cannot be described as an anthology of great poems" (preface). About seventy poets are represented, all of them living at date of publication.

*The Poets and Poetry of Ireland.* Edited by Alfred M. Williams. 444 pages. (Boston: Osgood.) 1881. A scholarly and discriminating selection, still valuable. Aims at presenting distinctively Irish poems (hence omission of Swift, Goldsmith, etc.) and inclusion of many translations from the Irish. Divided into sections according to types of poetry, each being prefaced by introductory essay and accompanied by critical and biographical notes.

*The Book of Irish Poetry.* Edited by Alfred Perceval Graves. (The Educational Co. of Ireland.) 1916. A volume in the series "Every Irishman's Library." Arranged under headings "Nature Poetry," "Wonder Poetry," "Love Poetry," "National Poetry," etc. "A selection of Irish poetry, old and new, old and modern Gaelic poems in English verse translation and Anglo-Irish poetry of the last two centuries which have most appealed to me as illustrating the leading features of Gaelic, Hiberno-English, and Anglo-Irish verse." The editor is one of the

foremost Irish (and we may add Celtic) literary men of the day.

Finally I would call attention to a pamphlet published by the English Association in May 1920, *A Reference Library: English Language and Literature*, and especially to Section 1 (works of individual poets), Section 41 (anthologies and selections), and Section 6 (literary history, biography, and criticism).





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